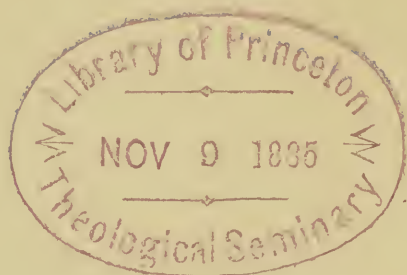


A LAYMAN'S STUDY  
OF THE  
ENGLISH BIBLE



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OF  
THE ENGLISH BIBLE  
CONSIDERED IN ITS  
LITERARY AND SECULAR ASPECT.

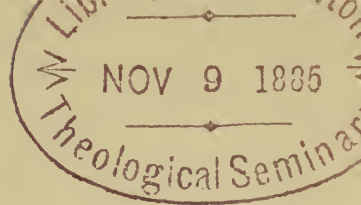
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# A STUDY OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION: THE BIBLE AS AN ENGLISH CLASSIC.

WHAT I purpose here to consider is the study of the English Bible, regarded exclusively in its literary and secular aspect, and the due place of such study in a system of liberal education. Hence the discussion will not be either philological or theological in character. I shall have little to say, except in the way of occasional reference, either about the original tongues, whether the Hebrew or the Greek, in which these books were first written, or about the religious dogmas which the various churches of Christendom have founded upon the interpretation of them. These branches of the subject must be left to the professional experts, the philologists and theologians, who have been fitted respectively for their peculiar tasks by their special studies. But it is perhaps unfortunate for the claims of the Bible to universal attention and respect that the

thorough study of it should have been made over almost entirely to these two classes of experts. The subject is interesting to others also, especially to the students of poetry, of English literature, of history and philosophy, and, indeed, of what may be called the science of human nature. At any rate, I propose now to look at the Scriptures only in the ordinary English version of them, just as if they were now, for the first time, placed before us, without any opinions previously formed respecting their character and purport; just as one might first enter upon the study of Gibbon's great historical work, or attempt to ascertain the characteristics of the Elizabethan age of English literature. To accept all the results of such an examination as is here intended, it is not necessary to belong to any one household of faith, or even to be a believer in Christianity. Romanist or Protestant, an intelligent pagan, a cultivated agnostic, even a Moham-medan, if he were a man of taste and education, might accept gladly, and without prejudice, any statements which I shall here have occasion to make.

Yet even as thus limited, the subject is a very broad one, and might well occupy the labor of a lifetime. For we have first to observe that the title, "The Bible,"—*the Book*, in a special and eminent sense,—is a misnomer in one respect,

since it is not one work, but a collection of many scriptures, widely differing from each other in their subjects and characteristics, and purporting to have been written respectively at very distant periods of time. Hence the title of the Latin Vulgate, *Biblia Sacra Vulgatæ Editionis*, "The Sacred Books in the commonly received Edition," is more precise and appropriate than their English appellation. The earlier portion of the collection contains thirty-nine distinct books, the later part twenty-seven others, having but little family likeness to each other, either in style or mode of treatment, either in the topics which they consider or in the ends which they subserve. Some are narrative in form, some didactic or hortatory, others epistolary, others still poetical. They contain legends, histories, biographies, poems, ethical and political injunctions, proverbs and parables, meditations on life and death or what we call 'philosophy,' and what purport to be revelations of the supernatural and of immortality. How far these distinct works are from being exclusively theological or religious in character appears at once from the fact that, in at least two of them, the Book of Esther and Solomon's Song, the name of God is not once mentioned from beginning to end. There is no other or better reason for lumping all these dissimilar writings together, and giving them one name as

"*the Book*," than there would be for including in a like collection, under a similar distinct appellation, works as heterogeneous as Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the Paston Letters, Shakespeare's Sonnets, Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, Holinshed's and Hall's Chronicles, Bacon's Essays, Milton's Paradise Lost, and a dozen other books taken at random from the Elizabethan or Stuart period.

This great diversity of subject and treatment is only what we ought to expect when it is further considered, that the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, as it is called, purport to contain the whole surviving literature, down to a period about 500 years before Christ, of one of the oldest and most remarkable races of men on earth, covering in its composition a space of nearly 900 years, considerable portions of it being unquestionably the oldest literature in the world which has come down to us in any but a merely fragmentary state. Let me go farther, and as our present purpose is only to mark out a preliminary outline of the subject in hand, let me venture to make some assertions which may at first seem hazardous, but which will appear amply substantiated by the evidence and considerations which will hereafter be adduced. I say, then, that these books contain a body of history, poetry, and philosophy, the study of which has done more than any other single cause to modify



the course and happiness of thinking men on the earth, and to color and direct the whole course of modern civilization. Human life is governed and made what it is not so much by outward circumstances, differences of external position, and material aids and appliances, as by the development of character, by the prevailing turn of passion and sentiment, and by the general current of opinion. Not what we have, but what we are, — not our material surroundings, but our ruling passions and habits of thought, together with the presence or absence of a bridle on the manifestation of them, — is what shapes our lives and determines our destinies. Great epochs in the history of the modern civilized world, such as the conversion of the northern tribes, the growth of the temporal power of the Church, the establishment of the monastic orders, the Crusades, the development of the Scholastic philosophy, the Reformation, the rise of Puritanism, are all attributable more or less directly to the one moral cause which we are now considering, the study of the Bible. It is not too much to say, that the Books of the Old and New Testament have exerted more influence, whether for weal or woe, on the course of human affairs among civilized nations than all other books put together. Their imprint is on most of the literature, the philosophy, the legislation, and the history, of the last 1700 years.

Leaving these general considerations, let us now come to particulars, and consider that aspect of the study of the *English* Bible which makes it interesting to the mere lover of literature. Look first at the diction, and weigh its merits regarded simply as a specimen of English prose. The opinion of scholars is unanimous that its excellence in this respect is unmatched; English literature has nothing equal to it, and is indeed largely indebted to conscious or unconscious imitation of it for many of its best and most characteristic qualities. The diction is remarkable for clearness, simplicity, and strength. It is as simple and natural as the prattle of children at play, yet never lacking in grace and dignity, or in variety and expressive force. Till our attention is called to it, we seldom notice what I may call the homeliness of the style, the selection of short and pithy Saxon turns of expression, and the wealth and strength of idiomatic phrase. One who should attempt to imitate it, would easily lapse into vulgar and colloquial language, or, in striving to avoid this fault, into a certain primness and stiffness of speech, which is even worse. In truth, it cannot be imitated; to write such prose as that of our Common Version is now one of the lost arts. And I have not yet mentioned what is to many persons the peculiar and most striking charm of the style; that is, its musical quality, the silvery ring of the

sentences, and the rich and varied melody of its cadences whenever the sense comes to a close. An excellent and learned ecclesiastic, who went over from the English to the Romish Church about forty years ago, thus speaks, after his conversion to Romanism, of the charm of this Biblical language.

“Who will say that the uncommon beauty and marvelous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the great strongholds of heresy in this country? It lives on the ear like a music that can never be forgotten; like the sound of church bells which the convert hardly knows how he can forego. Its felicities seem often to be almost things rather than mere words. It is part of the national mind, and the anchor of the national seriousness. . . . The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses. The power of all the griefs and trials of a man is hidden beneath its words; it is the representative of his best moments; and all that there has been about him of soft and gentle and pure and penitent and good speaks to him forever out of his English Bible.”—FABER, *Lives of the Saints*.

We are wont to speak of our Common Version as if it were, in the main, the work of King James’s translators, who first published the results of their labors in 1611. But this is a great mistake. The Version was gradually perfected by a slow process

of development which occupied the greater part of a century. A succession of eminent scholars and theologians labored one after another, for more than eighty years, to perfect the English translation of the Bible, each aiming to revise and improve the work of his predecessors. William Tyndale, the martyr, was the first of them; his version of the New Testament was published in 1525; several revised editions of it appeared in the next ten years; but he had not time to finish his translation of the Old Testament before he was seized by order of the Emperor, and burned at the stake as a heretic, in 1536. Yet Miles Coverdale was allowed to complete and publish his own translation, which appeared a year before Tyndale's death, with a dedication to King Henry. The Psalms in it are those now used in the Book of Common Prayer of the English Church. Coverdale also contributed largely to what was called Cranmer's, or "the Great Bible," which appeared in 1539, and in which much of Tyndale's language was preserved. He afterwards went to Geneva, where, in company with several English exiles, and with the aid of John Calvin and Theodore Beza, he produced what is called the Geneva translation, published in 1560, being founded mainly on Tyndale's and his own previous labors, but with a more careful comparison with the original texts. The so-called Bishops'

Bible, a revision of "the Great Bible," appeared about 1570; and the Roman Catholic translation from the Vulgate, usually styled the Rhemish and Douay Version, was printed, the New Testament in 1572, and the Old in 1610. Our Common Version, which dates from 1611, is based upon all these previous translations, being intended to combine their merits and improve upon them; it is largely indebted to them for its accuracy, its finish, and its phraseology. It was formed by fifty-four learned men, selected for the work, who were divided into six committees; and they were specially instructed that 'the Bishops' Bible was "to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit." The other versions were to be used, however, "when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible." It is obvious that the King James Translators did not have much more liberty assigned them than has been taken by the so-called Révisers in our own day, who have recently finished their work. They were enjoined to build upon the foundations that had been already laid; and they obeyed the injunction, their own labor being chiefly one of selection and amendment, which was admirably performed. It appears on comparison, that Tyndale contributed most to the diction and phraseology of our Common Version, while its accuracy and fairness were due to follow-



ing the lead of the Genevan and the Rhemish translators. If any names were worthy to be printed upon the title-page of our English New Testament, they should be those of William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale; for in the main it is their work. The later "translators," as they are styled, were merely committees of revision.

Now the century beginning about 1520, during which our English Bible thus gradually obtained its present beauty and finish, was precisely that in which our noble mother tongue completed its process of development and attained its highest stage of perfection. Since this period, there has been indeed an enlargement of its stores, in order to keep pace with the progress of science, invention, and art; but we witness no further process of organic growth. We see change, but no further amendment; rather a deterioration. This was the age of Hooker, Shakespeare, and Bacon; of Spenser, Latimer, and Raleigh; and it prepared the way for Hobbes and Dryden. It was the golden age of the English drama. These are great names, and many passages in their writings show a complete mastery of the English language, and form a grand display of its versatility, its sweetness, and its strength. But beside them all, and above them all, is the prose of our Common Version. It is more sustained than any of them, more uniformly strong

and melodious in its flow, reminding one of the famous couplet of Denham on the Thames : —

“ Though deep yet clear, though gentle yet not dull,  
Strong without rage, without o’erflowing full.”

And it has largely contributed to the fixation of the language at this its best estate, since the number of words in it the meaning of which has become obsolete in the course of nearly three subsequent centuries is so small that they may almost be counted on the fingers. True, the diction seems often to have a slightly archaic tinge; but this is an advantage rather than a fault, as it tends to preserve the dignity and impressiveness of the style. We no longer habitually use such words and phrases as *howbeit*, *spiritually-minded*, *heavy-laden*, *peradventure*, *handmaiden*, *waxed strong*, *dayspring*, *winebibber*, *husbandman*, and the like; but they are vigorous Anglo-Saxon English, and we are never at a loss how to understand them.

One other work, the “Common Prayer” of the Anglican Church, has a similar history, having grown up by successive revisions during the same period, and by the labor of the same class of persons, the clergy of the time, and has therefore nearly equal merits of style. In it, the translation of the *Te Deum*, the *Litany*, and many of the *Collects* and *Prayers*, are noble specimens of English

prose, at once simple and grand, varied and musical. Cranmer was its chief reviser and translator; but in other passages, his liking for stateliness of phrase, and for a certain balanced dualism of expression, imitated from the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, appears as a mannerism, and as such is a mark of inferiority. Such are the phrases "acknowledge and confess," "dissemble nor cloak," "assemble and meet together," "requisite and necessary," and the like.

I will cite one familiar passage from Tyndale's version, what is called the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise after the Annunciation, to show how closely the translators of 1611 followed his phraseology. His words are here copied exactly, though their spelling and probably their pronunciation are modernized.

"And Mary said, My soul magnifieth the Lord, and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour. For he hath looked on the poor degree of his handmaiden. Behold now from henceforth shall all generations call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things, and blessed is his name: and his mercy is always on them that fear him throughout all generations. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered them that are proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and



bath sent away the rich empty. He hath remembered mercy, and hath holpen his servant Israel; even as he promised to our fathers, Abraham and to his seed forever."

Memory will tell you how little change this language has undergone in our Common Version. One listens to it as to a familiar chime of the bells heard at evening in the distance. The Revisers of 1881 have altered it, and not for the better. For "put down the mighty from their seats," they have substituted "put down princes from their thrones." Stilted! For "his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation," as it stands in the Common Version, they have put "his mercy is *unto* generations *and* generations *on* them that fear him." Awkward, and a spoiling of the rhythm! "In remembrance of his mercy, as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever," they have altered into "that he might remember mercy, (as he spake *unto* our fathers,) *toward* Abraham and his seed forever." Uncouth and unEnglish! Such are the consequences of intruding nineteenth century phraseology into the pure and musical idiom of the sixteenth century! And who will say that the meaning or the poetry of this grand old psalm has profited by the change? It should be added that the Revision of the Old Testament, which appeared in 1885, has been far more successfully executed.

The alterations in it are less numerous and important, and they follow more closely the diction and the spirit of the earlier translators.

I ought to cite specimens in justification of the high praise here awarded to the English style of the Bible. But one is at a loss what to choose out of the wealth of material at hand; and then, so much of the charm of passages from the Scriptures is due to associations going back to one's childhood, and to the intrinsic power and sweetness of the thought, the precept, or the sentiment, that it is hard to fasten our attention on the mere diction. But in what follows, let me ask the reader to divest his mind, if he can, from all thought of the doctrine conveyed, or of the tenderness and pathos of the sentiment, and to consider the felicity and the music of the words alone.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” — MATTHEW xi. 28-30.

Again :

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For

I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." — MATTHEW xxiii. 37-39.

Once more :

"For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away : yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up : so man lieth down and riseth not : till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." — JOB xiv. 7-12.

Lastly :

"I will take no bullock out of thy house,  
Nor he goats out of thy folds.  
For every beast of the forest is mine,  
And the cattle upon a thousand hills.  
Will I eat the flesh of bulls,  
Or drink the blood of goats?  
Offer unto God thanksgiving;  
And pay thy vows unto the Most High :  
And call upon me in the day of trouble :  
I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

PSALM l. 9-15.

I may seem to have labored this point too much.  
But what is here said is particularly addressed to

young students, since it may be supposed that one leading purpose of their education is the formation of a good prose style, at once clear and flowing, strong and pure. I hope to show that the proper study of the Bible may be, and ought to be, a means of comprehensive and thorough training, not only in theology, to which it is but too often exclusively devoted, and in philosophy, poetry, and history, but also in literature and English style. In any scheme of University studies, it is a great mistake to make over any one department altogether to mere specialists, and thereby to lead the mind of the student along one narrow track, strictly fenced in against any excursion over the other broad fields of human culture which lie around it on every side. Now this end, the formation of a good prose style, cannot be attained by precept and system, by conscious effort or the observance of fixed rules. But just as a man's character and conduct are mainly determined by the company that he keeps, so his modes of utterance are silently fashioned by unconscious imitation of the models which he has often before him, that is, by the books which he most familiarly reads. It is said of Voltaire, that he always had a copy of the "*Petit Carême*" of Massillon lying on his writing-table, to be taken up during any odd quarter of an hour, for the sake of its influence on his style. The method was good, though perhaps

the choice was not happy. I think Pascal, Rochefoucauld, or La Bruyère would have served his purpose better. But there can be no doubt what English models we ought to select. Keep the Bible, a volume of Shakespeare, and Lord Bacon's Essays always within arm's-reach; half an hour devoted to either of them will be mere recreation, and will never be unprofitably spent. Only when your minds and memories have become saturated with the prose of our Common Version, with the phraseology of Shakespeare, and even, if one has command of French, with the neat succinctness, precision, and point of Pascal, will you have mastered the elements of a good English style. Then only will you have a copious vocabulary to draw from, a rich store of words and phrases and a variety of allusions always at hand, and not be obliged painfully to ransack a meagre and hidebound diction in order to set forth your meaning. But as most people nowadays read little except the newspapers and ten-cent novels, one need not wonder that they talk and write slang, or adopt only a slipshod, stilted, or uncouth phraseology. Coleridge rightly says, in his *Table-Talk*, "intense study of the Bible will keep any writer from being *vulgar* in point of style."

John Ruskin is certainly the greatest master that the present century has produced of pure, idiomatic, vigorous, and eloquent English prose; and as the

first volume of his "Modern Painters," perhaps his best work, appeared over forty years ago, when he was a recent "Graduate of Oxford," his style was perfectly formed while he was yet a young man. How was it formed? In one of his latest writings he has told us, that in his childhood, as a part of his home education, his mother required him to commit to memory, and repeat to her, passages from the Bible. A similar custom, as some of us old men know, prevailed here in New England over half a century ago, and I hope that in some families it lingers still. Ruskin gives us the exact list, twenty-six in number, of the Psalms and Chapters which he thus learned by heart; and as the selection was, in the main, an excellent one, we need not seek further for the secret of his admirable diction and perfect command of English phraseology. In his list are contained two Chapters from the Pentateuch, the 15th and 20th of Exodus; eight of the Psalms, among which are the 90th, the 119th, and the 139th; the 5th, 6th, and 7th of Matthew, being the whole Sermon on the Mount; and others.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE NARRATIVES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

BUT the books of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures have other and higher characteristics than those which concern merely the language in which they are written ; and these I proceed to consider. Among their contents are a large number of narratives, some legendary, some biographical, others purely didactic and spiritual, in purport. Let us distinguish these in thought, so far as is possible, from what is history properly so called on the one hand, and from poetry on the other. Perhaps the lines of division here are not clearly drawn ; but no matter. They are visible enough for the purpose in hand, which is to regard this collection of books simply as a body of literature, avoiding all controverted matter, and putting aside, for the nonce, the questions in theology and history to which they have given rise. To children of tender years, who have been properly taught, the Bible is simply a big story-book, and one of a very fascinating and instructive character. Some of these stories purport to be of real personages and events, while

others are avowedly fictitious, being of the nature of parables or allegories. But the incidents narrated, the characters which are introduced, and the conversations which are reported are of the simple yet lively character which belongs to the most ancient literature, and which seems to be the original aspect of primeval man. The earliest profane historians whose writings have come down to us have this childlike manner. Herodotus, for instance, tells stories like an old gossip, often with much liveliness and dramatic power, but with less feeling and impressiveness than the writers of the Pentateuch and the Books of Judges and Samuel. Xenophon is more studied and artificial, as belonging to a later age; but especially in the legends which he has preserved or composed concerning the elder Cyrus, he has much of the raciness, simplicity, and *naïveté* which characterize the olden time. The story which he tells of the death of Abradates and Panthea, through its unstudied gracefulness, its pathos, and the minuteness of detail with which the incidents and the talk are reported, is altogether in the ancient manner, and is inimitably fine. But it is too long to be cited here. As a single and brief specimen of the artless fashion, the graphic heaping together of particulars, and the frankness and freshness with which the oldest story-tellers spoke and wrote, take these few lines from the opening of the



16th book of the Iliad; — for the great Homer is only an old story-teller. I borrow Frank W. Newman's translation, somewhat modified, to make it conform more nearly to the original: —

“Patroclus, wherefore weepest thou, like to an infant maiden,  
Who, tripping at her mother's side, and clinging to her garment,  
Implorest to be lifted up, impedes her hurried going,  
And, to be lifted in her arms, with many a tear uplookest?  
So weepest thou, Patroclus.”

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.” We don't know whether Homer, who lived about one thousand years before Christ, did or did not witness the Trojan war. But we may be sure that he was a lover of children and had a good wife, besides being a shrewd observer; and that he often had a nice time of it in a happy and orderly household. If further evidence of the fact is needed, take the noted scene of Hector and Andromache, with the young Astyanax; or turn to the Odyssey for a domestic scene of the Princess Nausicaa, with her maidens, washing the linen at the waterside.

Now go back to a period over six hundred years before Homer was born, and take the story of Joseph and his brethren, as told in the Book of Genesis. It is one of a group of narratives, genealogies, and traditions about the dealings of God with primeval men, all referring more or less

distinctly to the origin of the Hebrew race, and indicating the development of some of its peculiar institutions, such as circumcision, and the hebdomadal division of time on which is founded the Jewish Sabbath. This group appears first to have been brought together and reduced to writing in the Mosaic age, at the time of the Exodus, and, I doubt not, under the direction of Moses himself, as one means of reconciling his people to the act of leaving Egypt and returning to the land which had been the home and the burial-place of their forefathers, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The story of Joseph is simply the traditional account of the events which first led to the prolonged sojourn of the Israelites in a land which was neither their original nor their destined home, but one in which, in their own affecting phrase, they were strangers in a far country. Evidently, before it was written out in Genesis, the legend had often been repeated orally in their tents, at their campfires, and by the mothers of the tribe in teaching their children. For it is essentially a family narrative, and we can fancy the hearts of these mothers swelling within them as they fondled their special favorites among the numerous children, and told them about Joseph, whom Jacob, his father, loved more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and was good and dutiful ; and about

Benjamin, who, as the youngest born, was the pet and darling of the whole household. And the story also had a strong local coloring; at that early day, the very dawn of the historical epoch of mankind, it would have been intelligible only to a people who knew all about Egypt, and had also heard much about Canaan, and the long journey through the desert between these two countries. Apart from the inevitable changes of text, the omissions and interpolations which must have attended its transmission, mostly in the form of successively transcribed manuscripts, through a period of some thirty-five centuries, I can no more doubt the essential genuineness and authenticity of the story, than I could deny those qualities, for instance, to the recently discovered history of Plymouth Colony, by Governor Bradford. It has the true ring of genuineness; it breathes the air of Egypt and the desert in the old, old times.

We can easily see why the narrative was so dear to the people whose origin it illustrates, and who so jealously watched over its preservation. More than any other people, the Hebrews had the instinct of nationality, the full pride of race. In their own eyes, they were Jehovah's chosen people, with whose fathers the Deity made a special covenant, that they should be his people and he should be their God. Their history illustrates the patri-

archal theory of the origin of a state as the natural expansion of a single family, which successively is developed into a clan, then branches off into a number of clans, and finally becomes a nation like unto the sands of the sea for multitude. All the Israelites are lineal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and, as compared with other races, they are of astonishingly pure blood. The story of Joseph and his brethren is simply the account of the development of this one family into the twelve tribes of Israel. Their faith is, that they have thus multiplied in the fulfilment of the promise of God unto their fathers. And they have clung to this faith through the long lapse of centuries, keeping themselves apart, and refusing intermarriage with other races. In captivity and exile, scattered abroad among all the nations of the earth, persecuted, imprisoned, burned at the stake, driven from one country into another, as in our own day from Germany and Russia into the United States, they are still Jews of the circumcision and the Passover, Jews of pure blood. Other races mingle with each other like rivers having a common outlet, which soon lose all trace of their separate identity. Where now are the Ionian or Attic Hellenes, the Greeks of the days of Pericles, or the Romans of Cæsar's day? Where the Goths and Huns, who overran half of Europe, or the Normans who fought under William

the Conqueror? Lost, swallowed up, in the great deep of the bastard races which have succeeded them. But the Jews are like a mighty river, which, winding its way of descent from the mountains through thousands of miles, pours at last into the great ocean with so vast a flood and rush of waters that the current repels the brine and preserves the sweetness of its stream far out to sea. Instead of asking how the story in Genesis and Exodus could be so long preserved, I ask rather how by such a people could it ever be forgotten. For, to adopt the fine remark of Pascal, there is a vast difference between a book which one makes and throws among a people, and a book which of itself makes a people. We then cannot doubt that the book is at least as old as the people.

The story of Joseph possesses in a marked degree all the features which have been noticed as belonging to the narrations which have come down to us from the earliest times. And it is, so to speak, more completely worked out than any other of the earlier legends in Scripture; that is, there are no apparent gaps or obscure passages in it, while the details are so full, and the personages so strongly marked and admirably supported, the conduct and talk of each being in perfect keeping with his character, that the narrative has an inimitable air of verisimilitude. It has all the sweetness, natural-



ness, and pathos which mark unmistakably a chronicle of the primeval times. It is too familiarly known to all to need here to be analyzed; but I ought to select some touches from it, in order to justify the high praise here given to it exclusively in its literary and secular aspect.

There is much dramatic vividness in the account given of the feelings of Joseph when first in presence of his brethren after their long separation, and still unknown to them, though he had recognized them instantly. He assumes to speak roughly to them, in order to preserve his disguise, while his heart is bursting with affection and anxiety for the two members of the family, who are not in the company, and whom he most loves, as they had no part in the horrible crime which the others had committed against him; namely, his aged father and the youngest born, his own mother's son. Hence the artifice through which he succeeds in compelling them to bring Benjamin with them on their second visit, Simeon meanwhile being retained as a hostage for his coming. And when they came again, nothing can be finer than the account of his demeanor, and the air of assumed indifference and mere courtesy, with which he questions them, though he is really in distressing suspense.

“And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, *the old man of whom ye spake*, is he yet alive?

And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive."

His quick eye has recognized Benjamin now in the troop, towards whom his heart is yearning, though he must not be recognized openly for fear of discovery.

"And he said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? God be gracious unto thee, my son. And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother; and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber and wept there."

Very touching is the remonstrance offered by Judah, on behalf of his brethren, when Joseph, really unwilling to part again from his young brother, threatens to detain Benjamin in Egypt, on a pretended charge of having stolen the goblet which was found in his sack.

"Now therefore," he says, "when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us, seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life, it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die; and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father to the grave. . . . Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I shall see the evil that shall come on my father."

There is great dignity, as well as pathos, in the manner in which Joseph now relents, makes himself known to his brethren, and announces his full forgiveness of the great sin which they had committed against him, showing also how Jehovah had overruled it for good.

“And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither ; for God did send me before you to preserve life.” Seeing that five years still remain of famine, “in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest,” “God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.”

Here the delicacy as well as nobleness of Joseph’s speech and conduct, founded on his piety, are admirably set forth, with an instinctive appreciation of what we moderns are wont to call a true gentleman’s character. Let me repeat Coleridge’s remark, that earnest study of the Bible is a sure safeguard against vulgarity.

Thus far I have commented on but one of the narratives found in the Old Testament, taking by preference the story of Joseph and his brethren, because it is nearly the earliest, and most complete in itself, and is certainly one of the most characteristic and attractive. A multitude of others invite



and would reward notice, the Book of Judges, in particular, being a repertory of legendary tales and ballads or songs of triumph, all belonging to the earlier history of the Israelites in the Promised Land, and heaped together with little concern for their connection with each other, or to filling the gaps so as to form a continuous record. Such are the stories of Jael and Deborah, of Gideon and his triumph over the Midianites, of Abimelech, of Jephthah and his daughter, of Samson and Delilah and the Philistines. These are not history, but the imperfect materials and data from which, in combination with other sources, history may be drawn. They are not religious records; they do not teach us a theology. But they are Hebraistic to the core; they are built round a nucleus of theocratic polity; and underlying them all is a foundation of spiritual faith, of rooted belief in the unity and the government of the eternal and invisible God. They are national traditions, such as had been repeated for centuries in the tents and at the campfires of the Tribes; deeply tinged with national pride, and exaggerated through the same feeling and the natural love of the marvellous. Most of them are admirably told, with much energy and fire, and as much minuteness of detail as if the narrators of them had actually witnessed the triumphs which they record. Through these legends thus

mossed with hoar antiquity, we catch indistinct glimpses of the heroes of the olden time, the ancient Judges of Israel, — grand figures, looming through the mist of ages, of men who trusted in God, and triumphed over their enemies because Jehovah fought with them. Looked at in this light, and regarded as objects of literary study, they are profoundly interesting and instructive. But as to defending the authenticity of the accounts in all their marvellous details, or praising the conduct in every respect of the personages engaged in them, or setting up their characters as models for imitation, or believing that some of the actions attributed to them were specially enjoined by the Almighty, or accepting the estimate of the magnitude of the forces arrayed against each other in some of the great battles, — I should as soon think of attempting to whitewash the reputations of the officers in command in some of the incidents of our recent Civil War, or to indorse the official reports concerning them. On the other hand, scepticism must not be carried too far. While we may doubt the return of numbers, both of those who fought and those who fell, we are not to deny that a great battle was fought at Antietam, or that, after a siege not quite as long as that of Troy, Richmond was captured. I have not much respect for the arithmetical computations and criticisms of the Colenso school.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD. — THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE.

LEAVING for the present the legends and stories in the Old Testament, we turn to the fictitious narratives which constitute a distinctive feature of the teachings of our Lord ; I mean the Parables. It is difficult to do justice to these in thought, because their very excellence has rendered them so familiar that their beauty is obscured by their triteness, and one seems in treating of them to trespass on the limits of the commonplace. A theme may be so grand that even great familiarity with it, though failing to breed contempt, yet does not fail to generate weariness and neglect. Thus, no visible object whatever, when viewed through some knowledge of the immensities of space and the eternity of duration and unchangeableness which it involves, is in itself so beautiful and impressive as the starry heaven above us at evening, especially when seen in the gloriously clear atmosphere which our climate so often gives us in the summer and autumn. But though the poet defiantly asks of such a sky,

“ Bespangled with those isles of light,  
So wildly, spiritually, bright : —  
*Who* ever looked upon them shining,  
And turned to earth without repining, —  
Nor wished for wings to flee away  
And mix with their eternal ray? ” —

I am afraid all of us will be obliged to confess, that we have more frequently than not walked home on such a night without casting a single glance upward. Just so has it been with those stars of the Gospel, the Parables of our Lord. We have heard so much about them ever since infancy, in talks, readings, lectures, and sermons, that the mind seems almost to recoil from the well-worn theme. A prejudice thus conceived is the more difficult to be encountered, since it is not merely an unfounded opinion, which is always open to argument, but a feeling or sentiment, an aversion, which we cannot away with, however unreasonable it may be made to appear. But this difficulty must be met, as the theme is a necessary portion of the full development of the whole subject.

Consider, first, that what is most peculiar and distinctive in the form of our Lord's discourses to the multitudes who heard him is the use which he makes of parables to illustrate and enforce the spiritual doctrine that he teaches and the precepts that he enjoins. In this respect, he had no prototype,

and in early times he found no imitator. Not his immediate disciples, not the great apostle to the Gentiles, none of the early fathers of the Church, seems even to have essayed in this respect to walk in his steps, or to have made his example the pattern for their own discourse. Images, similitudes, types, and allegories, indeed, abound in their writings ; for many of them had an oriental wealth of imagination, and much subtlety, ingenuity, and fancy in tracing out a resemblance or an analogy even to its minutest details. But the proper Parable — on the face of it as simple as a nursery tale, and yet involving such a profundity of meaning, so vivid in its presentation of truth and portraiture of character, and so impressive in bringing the lesson home to men's hearts and lives — seems to me unique in all literature. I find no genuine specimens of it in ancient times, save those which came from Jesus of Nazareth. But with him it is so perpetually recurrent that it seems the natural garb of his thought ; “and without a parable,” we are told, “spake he not unto them.” Even his disciples wondered at this peculiarity of manner, and asked him, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables ?” Of course, there is another meaning of the word *parable*, according to which it signifies any dark saying in which some great truth is involved or dimly intimated, when, for some temporary rea-

son, it would be unfit to announce it openly. And it is to this meaning, as I think, that the answer of Jesus to the question put by his disciples exclusively refers, though they evidently misunderstood it by making it general, and thus wrongly made it applicable to the majority of cases, in which the purpose is not to veil the truth, but to set it forth as vividly as possible, and, as it were, to brand it in letters of fire upon the conscience and the memory. I find but one parable properly so called in the whole of the Old Testament, and that is the brief and touching apologue of the one ewe lamb, with which the prophet Nathan rebukes the crying sin of David. The lively fiction of the talking trees, in the 9th chapter of Judges, is not a parable, but a fable, altogether in the manner of Pilpay and Æsop. And when, in the grand old legend of Balak and Balaam, in the Book of Numbers, the latter is said to "take up his parable," the phrase evidently means "began his prophetic song." It is not denied that, in some Rabbinical writings of uncertain date, similitudes and illustrations may be found which are carried so much into detail that they may be called parables; and in a few cases, the phrases and thought in these are so like those in the Gospels that we must suspect their writers of conscious imitation or plagiarism. But they are all either so feeble and insipid, or so strained



and unnatural, that I find nothing in them to deserve attention. After the eighth or ninth century of our era, indeed, both among the Greeks and the Latins, attempts were made to imitate the Parables of our Lord; and some of these attempts are pleasing and forcible. But they are immeasurably inferior to their divine originals, which stand alone in all literature, matchless alike in conception and form.

Let us first endeavor to point out the peculiar features of a parable, whereby it is distinguished both from the fable and the proverb. In the fable properly so called, plants or animals, sometimes even inorganic things, appear as personages in the narrative, talk and act like men, while the ethical or spiritual meaning would seem to lurk far beneath. Here the fabulous or fictitious feature of the illustration is put forward and made prominent, the moral, or what is called "the improvement" of the fable, really becoming more distinct and emphatic, when man is made to look at a conceivable exemplification of it in the lower orders of being, and human nature is thus taught to recognize its imperfection, folly, or sin, through seeing it caricatured, as it were, by the fox, the grasshopper, or the wolf, by the willow or the bramble. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard," exclaims king Solomon; "consider her ways, and be wise." But always the



story is put first, and the lesson which it is to teach comes afterward, as if by necessary, though not avowed, implication.

In the proverb, on the other hand, this order is reversed; the precept or truth is put first, or is directly inculcated, while the image or illustration follows, its function being that of a barb to the hook, the truth being thereby made so pungent that it clings to the attention and the memory. Thus Dr. Franklin, a great master of this homely and popular wisdom, says, "Poverty often deprives a man of all spirit and virtue; it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright." In the best proverbs, the illustration is so apt and striking, that the truth needs not to be separately expressed, but forces its own way, as it were, by irresistible implication. "There will be sleeping enough in the grave," as Poor Richard says. Here the thought was anticipated by "the great Arnauld," who, when he had already completed eighty years of a most laborious life, and was implored by his friend Nicole to take some repose, exclaimed impatiently, "Rest! Shall we not have all eternity in which to rest?"

The proper parable is an imaginary scene from real life vividly set forth, in order to bring some truth home to the hearts and consciences of men. It is a brief drama, not resting, like the fable, on some extravagant fiction as its groundwork, nor

condensed, like the proverb, into a single pithy phrase or striking image; but dependent for its effect on the naturalness and probability of the story, and on the lifelike manner in which it is told. Through a short narrative, or a single familiar incident strikingly depicted, the most abstract and comprehensive truth may be presented in a concrete form, and thus, as it were, what would be a dry skeleton is clothed with living flesh and blood.

Each of the Parables deserves study not only in reference to the occasion which suggested it and to the doctrine which it teaches, but also as a revelation of the character of him who uttered it, and of the general spirit and purpose of his ministry on earth. Thus, one considerable group of them appears inspired chiefly by ineffable pity for mankind who have wandered so far away from the true path, and by the spirit of divine compassion which seeks to reclaim them from the blindness of error and the misery consequent upon sin. This is the godlike purpose so forcibly expressed as the conclusion of one of them, in the solemn declaration, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Still more distinctly and earnestly is this spirit of his ministry announced in his stern rebuke of the Pharisees, when they blamed him for eating with pub-

licans and sinners: — “Go ye and learn what that meaneth, ‘I will have mercy and not sacrifice;’ for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Observe now the tenderness of feeling and the picturesqueness of detail with which this grand assurance is brought home to the understanding and the conviction of those who heard him through the brief but beautiful Parable of the Lost Sheep. Let me say, that in studying this Parable, you should combine, as I have attempted to do here, the two independent reports of it given respectively by Matthew and Luke; for, while agreeing in substance and, in the main, in language, each preserves some minute incident or graphic touch in the narrative or the comment, which is omitted in the other. The earlier report is prefaced by repeating once again that announcement of the leading purpose of his mission which Jesus now proceeds to illustrate and enforce. “For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, or into the wilderness, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that *one* than of the ninety and nine, which went not astray. And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his

shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me ; for I have found my sheep which was lost. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

And here let me apologize for the treatment to which I am now subjecting the narratives in the Bible, including even those uttered by our Lord, by again remarking that I am not a clergyman endeavoring to preach a sermon (though I may seem to come perilously near to it), but am merely a layman and a teacher, seeking only, as far as it may be done reverently and with an honest purpose, to set forth the literary merits of the English Bible, especially those most deserving study and imitation by persons who are seeking what University men proudly call a classical and liberal education. I am attempting to do for this Book just what other writers, with greater learning and success, have attempted to do for the poems of Homer and the drama of Æschylus and Sophocles. With any other than such an end in view, I should be justly chargeable with unspeakable folly and impertinence in thus presuming, through a critical examination, to set forth what may be called the external characteristics of the discourses of our Lord, or their merely literary merits.

Going back to the particular passage just cited, observe how some incidents in it, as in most of the other Parables, have so vivid a local coloring that they strongly suggest the circumstances and the scene which were before the eyes of Jesus and his audience when it was uttered. Life in Palestine, as in most other hot countries in the East, was mainly spent out of doors, and the chief occupations of the people were agriculture and tending flocks and herds. It is evident from the Gospel record, that during his whole ministry our Lord taught and lived principally in the open air. Indeed, there was another reason why he should do so. He had no home; and at times, we know, this fact and his hearers' frequent want of sympathy with him gave him a sense of loneliness in his work. There is deep pathos in the remark which fell from him almost involuntarily, when an ardent proselyte exclaimed to him, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." The sad answer is returned, not as a complaint, but as a warning:—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." Even an upper room had to be borrowed in which the little company were to celebrate what was to be the Last Supper. Thus living and teaching, face to face, with outward nature, we can understand why so frequently in our Lord's discourses lessons are



drawn from the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air, from the sower and his seed, the vineyard, the barren fig tree, the shepherd and his flock. Each of these objects, as they came successively into view during their wanderings is pointed out by gesture, and made to enforce the doctrine already in hand, or to suggest some new moral or spiritual truth. Thus we can easily imagine the surroundings amid which the parable just commented upon was first spoken ; — an opening among the hills of Palestine expanding into a range of pastoral country, with a flock of sheep in the foreground, seemingly for a while without a shepherd ; but in the distance, just issuing from a mountain pass, the shepherd is seen bearing a sick or tired sheep on his shoulders, and hastening back to his flock. Jesus points to him, and makes the familiar scene illustrate and enforce the great truth which he is never weary of teaching.

The same eagerness of divine compassion to reclaim the fallen, the same encouragement to repentance, shines through several of the other parables ; as in that of the Two Debtors, the Friend at Midnight, the Lost Piece of Money, the Laborers in the Vineyard, where even those who come at the eleventh hour are welcomed, and especially in what seems to me the most beautiful and affecting of them all, the Prodigal Son. Here, the ful-

ness of effect is produced through the number of incidents and characters, the skill with which these are grouped or contrasted with each other, the deep feeling which pervades the whole, and the dramatic force and liveliness with which the whole story is conceived and told. Merely as a literary study, I know of nothing finer in all literature, the language in which the narrative is presented in our Common Version being luckily an adequate and graceful garb for every feature of the thought. Observe how the selfish and arrogant character of the Younger Son is marked at the outset in his imperious demand, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." There was no legal ground for such a claim, but the loving father at once assents; the reckless and unfeeling son then grasps together all that he has, and goes to a distant place, where he can indulge his taste for riot and debauchery without reading in the eyes of all who had known him a stern censure of his conduct. Guilt is shamefaced, and instinctively seeks a hiding place, even when it has no immediate cause for dread. But the punishment is swift to come. Far from friends, without resource, and pinched by hunger, he is obliged to accept the most degrading form of menial service, and even to fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat. Remorse visits him, and wrings from him at last the agoniz-



ing resolve, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." The passionate force of this language shows that the measure of repentance at length is full; and the touching account of his welcome home and entire pardon follows. "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." But the lesson would still be incomplete if without mention of the jealous sullenness, the hard and ungracious remonstrance, of the Older Son; for this brings out still more forcibly the patience which cannot be wearied, the tenderness which knows no bounds, the infinite pity, of the Father. How gentle is his reproof of the ingratitude and resentment of his first-born! "Son, *thou* art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." And then the exultation of his heart at the return of the prodigal breaks out again into the sort of triumphant song with which the parable ends. "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." It is a mistake to regard the story merely as an encouragement for the sinner to repent; it is also the most beautiful picture ever revealed to the world of the loving fatherhood of God.

Let me in conclusion of this portion of my subject, in respect both to the two parables which I have tried to analyze, and to the others upon which I now have not time to dwell, ask the reader to consider how deeply their imagery and phraseology, during these many centuries, have imprinted themselves on the hearts and consciences of all Christendom ; how they have filled all minds with trains of pleasant and tender associations, which the slightest touch at any moment is enough to awaken ; how widely and intimately they are worked into the art, the eloquence, and the poetry of all modern times. A mere enumeration of their titles — the Good Samaritan, the Pearl of Great Price, the Talents, the Sower, the ten Virgins, five of whom were wise and five were foolish, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Unmerciful Servant, the Pharisee and the Publican — is enough to call back many of the happiest memories of our childhood, and to strengthen the better resolutions of our riper years. Dispute as you may about the inspiration of other portions of the Bible ; there can be no question that he who uttered the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables spake as never man spake, and that the message which he brought was one of inestimable importance for the salvation of mankind. “ How knoweth this man letters, having never learned ? ” Consider for a moment

the time and the place of his ministry, and the people to whom he spoke ; and then say whether to speak such lessons then and there, and to the countless millions who have heard them since, was not as great a miracle even as raising Lazarus from the dead.

Besides the Parables and the other discourses and conversations of our Lord, we find in the Gospels four brief and artless narratives of the principal incidents in his life and ministry, beginning with his nativity, and ending with his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. The first three of them — the Synoptic Gospels, as they are called — tell what is essentially the same story ; they agree with each other very perfectly in the record both of what he spake and of what he did and suffered, with no greater differences or discrepancies than are to be expected from three independent accounts of the same life. They are independent, since no one of them makes any direct reference to either of the other two, and each has some characteristics of its own, and reports some events and sayings, or adds some touches of description and phraseology, not to be found elsewhere. Except a cursory allusion in the proem to Luke's Gospel, that others had arranged an orderly account (whether by dictation, or preaching, or in writing, is not mentioned) of what we have been told by eye-witnesses

and ministers of the word, each Evangelist seems to write as if his own record was the only one.

But the Fourth Gospel has some strongly marked traits distinguishing it from the others ; it describes many events of which they make no mention, and reports long discourses in respect to which they are entirely silent. Moreover, these discourses preserved only in John's Gospel, while their general tone, their spirit and tendency, are not unlike the words of Jesus recorded by the first three Evangelists, are more figurative, mystical, and abstruse ; they are harder to be understood. Harmonizing in spirit, they seem to offer a new aspect and a subsequent chapter of the same character and life. These peculiarities may at least partially be explained by the later period at which this Book was written, and by the strongly marked temperament and intellect of its author, by which in his old age his recollections of his Lord and Master were deeply colored. The first Epistle of John exhibits the same characteristics as the Gospel which bears his name ; it is equally refined, mystical, and tender ; equally impassioned in setting forth God's love to man, and the consequent duty of men to love one another. This was the chief lesson which his affectionate and somewhat dreamy disposition had imbibed from intimate personal intercourse with Jesus, from listening to the words which he spake, and witnessing

the wonders that he did. It was the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the doctrine which breathes throughout the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Separation of the Sheep from the Goats. And when, in extreme old age, in a distant city of Asia Minor, he undertook for the first time to dictate or write the Gospel which bears his name, or one of his hearers wrote it for him as a summary of the discourses which he had preached so often and so long, what wonder that his recollection of the very words used by our Lord should have been inextricably mixed up with his own somewhat mystical exposition and paraphrase of them, which had been the burden of his instructions to his flock during the more than fifty years which had elapsed since the crucifixion. The spirit of the discourses so reported, and the great truths taught in them, are always those of Jesus ; the words and the bold figures of speech, as it seems to me, are often those of John alone.

According to the best evidence now attainable, no one of the three Synoptics was written till more than a quarter of a century had passed after the death of Jesus. Down at least to A. D. 61, Jewish and Gentile converts to the Church owed all their knowledge of the life and the sayings of Christ to



the preaching of the twelve Apostles, and probably of many other eye-witnesses and hearers of the word in Galilee and Jerusalem; for these things were "not done in a corner." During all this time they had no written word and they needed none; for they were encompassed with a cloud of witnesses who told them of what they had both seen and heard, of what had occurred during their lifetime, perhaps in their own neighborhood, and thereby preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection from the dead. This period of the Gospel delivered orally and not by writing was the time of the most rapid growth and diffusion of the Church, branches of it being instituted at Antioch, Damascus, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, and many other cities of many lands. The multitude of believers increased daily at Jerusalem and throughout Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, under the preaching of Paul and his companions and coadjutors. About half of Paul's Epistles were then written, and the earliest account that we possess of the institution of the Lord's Supper is contained in his first letter to the Corinthians. His version of this memorable event agrees wonderfully, both in the spirit and the letter, with the corresponding accounts in the first three Gospels, though of course he wrote by hearsay from the other Apostles; and this shows the attention that was paid to verbal exactness in the spoken

word through which exclusively the early Church was founded. Of this early period we can piece together a tolerably full history from the rather broken and desultory record of it in the Acts of the Apostles, and from numerous allusions and indications in the Epistles. The Twelve appear to have acted in concert, and generally with great harmony both in doctrine and conduct, holding conferences with each other whenever points of difference arose.

Towards the close of this period came the terrible Neronian persecution, of which we have a minute account from the Pagan historian, Tacitus, who wrote on the spot concerning what, though then a young child, he may actually have witnessed. His recital is further confirmed by another Pagan historian, "the diligent and accurate Suetonius," who was born but a few years after the Christians at Rome were subjected to this fiery trial. As our own learned historian, Gibbon, whose bias was certainly to discredit the narrative if he had been able to do so, frankly acknowledges that "the most sceptical criticism is obliged to respect the truth of this extraordinary fact, and the integrity of this celebrated passage of Tacitus;" and since the strong prejudice of Tacitus himself against the Christian belief is conspicuous enough in the account, thus unintentionally adding to the weight of



his testimony in favor of those who then held and openly maintained that belief, I will here insert the whole narrative, borrowing Gibbon's translation of it, which is both elegant and faithful. The pretext for the persecution originated in a terrible conflagration at Rome, by which more than half of the city was reduced to ashes. To divert the popular suspicion that Nero himself had set Rome on fire, and had chanted in mockery the fall of Troy while it was burning, "the emperor resolved to substitute in his own place some fictitious criminals."

"With this view (continues Tacitus), he inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men, who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, were already branded with deserved infamy. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, had suffered death by the sentence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. For a while this dire superstition was checked; but it again burst forth, and not only spread itself over Judea, the first seat of this mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious. The confessions of those who were seized discovered a great multitude of their accomplices, and they were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city, as for their hatred of human kind. They died in torments, and their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses; others sewn up in the skins of wild beasts,

and exposed to the fury of dogs ; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied with a horse race, and honored with the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. The guilt of the Christians deserved indeed the most exemplary punishment ; but the public abhorrence was changed into commiseration, from the opinion that those unhappy wretches were sacrificed, not so much to the public welfare as to the cruelty of a jealous tyrant.”

Even Gibbon is impressed with the force of the contrast when he reminds his readers, that these gardens and circus of Nero on the Vatican hill are now the site of a Christian temple whose magnificence mocks the ancient glories of the Roman capitol,—a temple erected by sovereign pontiffs who have extended their claims to spiritual dominion throughout the civilized world.

This early period of an unwritten Gospel naturally came to a close when the generation of those who had been eye-witnesses and hearers of Jesus was rapidly dying out, and when the extension of the Christian faith to distant lands had created a need of some permanent means of preserving and diffusing their testimony and instructions. The four Gospels as we now possess them appear to be

brief and simple records of the teachings of the Apostles. It is not certain that each of them was entirely written by the person whose name it bears, though it undoubtedly contains the substance of what one Apostle, perhaps of what several Apostles, had preached, of that to which they had borne witness, during many years. The headings of the manuscripts, "According to Matthew," "According to John," etc., merely signify that the story of Jesus is therein told according to the version of it which had been so often repeated by that Apostle. Mark was not an attendant on Jesus Christ during his ministry, but appears to have been an intimate friend and companion of Peter, who, in his first Epistle, affectionately calls him his son. There has been a constant tradition in the Church, vouched by the earliest authors, that he was only the amanuensis or interpreter of Peter, who either dictated this Gospel to him, or supplied the materials for it in the numerous discourses to which his friend had listened. In the proem to the third Gospel, we have Luke's direct assertion that he wrote in view of the declarations made by many others respecting "those things which are most surely believed among us;" he does not even imply that he was himself an eye-witness of what he narrates, but only that he had had "perfect understanding of all things from the very first;" that is, that he had been thoroughly in-

structed in them by those who were "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word."

The four Gospels as we now possess them seem to be brief and imperfect transcripts from that original oral testimony of the companions and disciples of Jesus to the frequent repetition of which the earliest converts to Christianity had listened for nearly thirty years, and which was the sole foundation of their faith. Each separate transcript is imperfect, because either the writer of it, or the Apostle whose testimony it records, had some special purpose, taste, or principle of selection which made certain portions of the narrative more interesting to him than the parts which he omitted. Matthew reports by preference the sayings and discourses of our Lord, giving but a brief and hurried account of the outward events in his ministry, except of its beginning and its close. Mark, on the other hand, is minute and full in the narration of events, often adding little incidents and touches of description which are wanting elsewhere, and which make his statements seem more lively and truthful; but his report of what Jesus said is very concise, and sometimes appears incomplete. Matthew's Gospel was primarily intended for the Jews, and gives in great detail the circumstances and speeches, especially the cases of apparent fulfilment of prophecy, which would naturally be most interesting to that people.

Again, Matthew and Mark are evidently simple and unlearned men, who furnish a plain and unvarnished account of what seemed to them most interesting in the ministry of Christ. But Luke was certainly a person of considerable literary taste and culture, and wrote with some special reference to the Greeks and Romans, because he was long a travelling companion of Paul and Barnabas in their mission to the Gentiles. The Jewish and Messianic element is not brought forward so prominently in his Gospel as in its two predecessors. All three of the Synoptics dwell at length upon the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and at a distance from Jerusalem ; while John, who wrote at least a quarter of a century after them, with full knowledge of their contents, and with an evident purpose to supplement their accounts by preserving passages in the life and teachings of Jesus which they had omitted, confines his report in the main to what took place in Judea.

From the view here taken of the origin of the Gospels, it is easy to understand why the authors of them, though writing without concert with each other, and except in the case of John, without any knowledge of what the others had already written, should frequently adopt the same language in their several reports. The words and phrases which they employ in corresponding passages are some-



times identical, and often strikingly similar. Because it is so evident that there was no concerted action between the Evangelists, these frequent cases of verbal agreement have greatly puzzled the commentators. I find in them nothing surprising. Each gives an independent report of a common original, — of that oral Gospel, that original testimony of the Apostles and other eye-witnesses, which had been for more than a quarter of a century the sole nutriment, the only means of edification, of the primitive Church. Through frequent repetition, the very words and phrases of that primitive story had become stereotyped in the hearts and memories of the listeners who became the early converts to Christ. Especially in reporting the precepts, conversations, and discourses of Jesus, this verbal coincidence is natural, and therefore is frequent and manifest. In this case, the very words are hallowed, and great attention was naturally paid to the exact preservation of them. We cannot doubt that most of the phraseology of the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables was as familiarly known to the primitive Church before as after our present Gospels were written.

It is obvious that the account here given tends strongly to confirm the genuineness and authenticity of the whole Gospel narrative; since it appears that this narrative contains the testimony not merely of the four Evangelists whose names it bears, but of

the whole body of the disciples, the hearers and eye-witnesses, of our Lord's ministry on earth. In fact, it contains the evidence of all the contemporaries of Jesus, both in Galilee and at Jerusalem, who had listened to his discourses and beheld the wonders that he did, and who constituted or taught his Church during the first generation ; for the original testimony, the oral Gospel, must have been frequently preached in their hearing, and they would have been sure to detect and discredit misstatements or unfounded additions to the story. Nay, even the multitude of those who saw and heard, but did *not* believe, — the sceptical Sadducees, the persecuting Scribes and Pharisees, — may be said to bear testimony indirectly in his favor ; for they were eager to calumniate, to contradict and disprove ; and what escaped or vanquished their irritated watchfulness and scrutiny, their jealousy and hate, must be true. Take, for instance, the mocking and shouting crowd who were present at his trial before Caiaphas and Pilate, when "all the disciples forsook him and fled ;" many of this crowd must subsequently have followed him to Calvary, and there witnessed the crucifixion ; and how prompt they would have been to detect and expose, either in the oral Gospel, which was preached to their contemporaries, or in the written narratives by which this was succeeded, any statements which were exaggerated or false.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE BIBLE.

IT might seem that the next properly succeeding portion of my topic would be the poetry of the Bible. But I find that both the poetry and the history in the Hebrew Scriptures are so thoroughly underwoven and colored by what I have been obliged, through the want of a better term, to call their 'philosophy,' that some consideration of this last must precede, before any full comment upon the two former would be intelligible. Let us therefore try first to understand the meaning of this much abused word, and thus perhaps to find an explanation of what is most peculiar in the character and the writings of the Hebrew people.

The proper function of philosophy is to determine accurately the being, the nature, and the mutual relations of the three great objects of human thought, — namely, the Universe, Man, and God. This is Kant's definition of it, and I know not that a better one has ever been offered. Thus understood, philosophy is not science, and is not religion; but it is the foundation on which alone both science

and religion must be built. That foundation consists of those primitive and fundamental truths upon which the whole fabric of our knowledge rests, and by which it is regulated; it is the aggregate of first principles, which constitute the essence of the human mind, and determine the whole course and tendency of human thought. According to some, these principles are authoritative because they are innate; they are born with us, and must be accepted as such, because nothing lies behind them, through which they could either be proved or refuted. Now the Hebrews virtually teach the same doctrine when they declare that these primary truths are a revelation from God. They profess with Elihu in the Book of Job, "Behold there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." To accept these truths is for them an act of religious faith; and in this sense, certainly, their philosophy and their theology are one. Hence we have first to ascertain the relation of their sacred books, especially of the Pentateuch, which is in the highest sense their "Book of the Law," to this supposed revelation of divine truth; and this question may be most conveniently considered here in respect to the whole body of the Scriptures. In what sense, then, and to what extent, does the Bible purport to be a revelation from God?

I answer, first, that, strictly speaking, it does not even claim to be a revelation in itself, but only to contain the record of several revelations. This is evident from the fact already mentioned, that the Old Testament includes the whole body of Hebrew literature down to a comparatively recent period. As such, it is a miscellaneous aggregate of historical documents, of various forms of poetry, of hortatory and didactic discourses, which have often no other or higher claim to be divinely inspired than the corresponding portions of the English or French literature of modern times. As already mentioned, we find in it two Books, Esther and Solomon's Song, in neither of which is the name of God once mentioned from beginning to end, and which do not even profess to be an exposition either of moral or religious truth. "Search the Scriptures," says our Lord; "for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me;" that is, you must *search* in order to find in them either the law or the testimony. But search and ye will find both; for the Bible does purport to contain a record, though a broken and imperfect one, of the word of God as made known unto man in three successive and distinct revelations. The earliest of these is the patriarchal or primitive revelation, the record of which is wholly contained in the Book of Genesis. It was the faith of Abraham and the

other patriarchs, men who walked with God, to whom he made known his will, and with whom he entered into a covenant, in which his favor was conditioned upon their obedience to his law. This primeval revelation was not abrogated, but confirmed and enlarged, and made the foundation of the special polity of the Jews, in the second grand announcement of the law, which was made by Moses in the wilderness. Under this Mosaic dispensation the believing Jews continue to this day. In the New Testament, we find a record of the third and far the most complete and adequate revelation of God to man, based as before on what had preceded it, which it does not supersede, but sanctions and reaffirms in all its essential features, while supplementing them with new and higher truth. Christianity is related to Judaism as the splendor of the noonday sun is to the early twilight. "Think not," its author exclaims, "that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Now these fundamental truths, which the Bible assumes to have been first made known to the world by primeval revelation, which were adopted and built upon by the later and more special mani-

festations and disclosures of God's will and purpose, and are still imprinted as birthmarks upon the hearts and consciences of men, constitute what I have ventured to call the 'philosophy' both of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I shall endeavor hereafter to show more particularly what they are, and to show what are their relations to each other, and to the various other doctrines which have been set forth as systems of philosophy either in ancient or modern times.

Meanwhile, let me call attention for a moment to the general fact here taken for granted, that we find in the Book of Genesis, and indeed throughout the Bible, clear and indisputable indications that there was, and is, a primeval revelation of God's truth to man, and to the bearing of this fact upon some theories broached in our own day respecting the primitive state of man on earth and the origin of his civilization. The theory of the evolutionists, as you know, is that man is the son of a monkey; the philosophy of the Bible teaches throughout that he is a child of God. The former make out a supposititious history of what they suppose to be the several stages of unassisted progress from barbarism to civilization, and rashly conclude that man actually has risen by his own efforts, merely because they see no reason why he might not so rise under favorable circumstances. But accord-



ing to the account in Genesis, man has *fallen* from a former state of innocence and happiness through his own fault in weakly yielding to temptation, and so plunging into corruption and wickedness. According to the one doctrine, man has steadily risen without external aid, by a process of necessary development, from an organization and a condition identical with the organization and the condition of the brutes, to the heights of civilization, refinement, and religion now occupied by the most favored races. Against this hypothesis, for it is nothing more, we cite the objection urged by Archbishop Whately, and confirmed by all history and observation, that mere savages "never did, and never could, raise themselves, unaided, into a higher condition." In support of the opposite doctrine, that savagery has arisen through degradation from a former happier state, we cite the undeniable fact, that eastern Europe and western and central Asia are strewn with the wrecks of empires and civilizations that have perished; and that most of the barbarous races which now exist afford evidence through traditions, or the possession of ingenious tools and implements which they are evidently incompetent to invent, or through other manifest external indications, that their progenitors were vastly wiser and more cultivated than they. Even our North American Indians were preceded by the

mound-builders, a comparatively intelligent race. The native Mexicans and Peruvians, whom the Spaniards found here, possessed some relics of the comparatively advanced civilization of the ancient nations from whom they sprang. Still further: the two exclusively human endowments of language and the use of fire prove conclusively that man was originally taught by God. They could not have been invented except by a highly civilized people; for without them, even a beginning of civilization would be obviously impossible, and man, if he was a brute to begin with, must always have remained a brute. The divine origin of one of them is indicated in the beautiful myth of the Greeks, that Prometheus stole fire from heaven. And of language, as soon as we perceive that it does not consist merely in giving names to things, but that it is an organic structure, marvellously complex and intricate, founded on a philosophical analysis of the elements of human thought, may we not well say, that it could no more have been a human invention than is the anatomical structure of the human body, but that in both cases the inventor and fashioner was divine? That mere savages, as yet hardly raised above their kindred brutes, and unaided by a divine instinct specially implanted in them for the purpose, could have invented both language and the use of fire, or could



have taken the first step towards civilization without the aid of both, is a doctrine which can be entertained only by those who can believe in a chance development of all things out of mud.

In what sense, and to what extent, these two momentous agencies, which first made human civilization possible, together with those primitive and innate truths and injunctions which form the groundwork of man's moral and spiritual nature, are to be regarded as special revelations from a superhuman source of wisdom and power, may be learned from Kant's exposition of the functions of conscience and the absolute character of the moral law. The 'Categorical Imperative,' which is his phrase for the voice of conscience, is the expression, not of any general and abstract truth, but of an absolute and universal 'Command,' which assumes to regulate man's whole inner being and outward conduct through governing all his desires, volitions, and aims. It is a 'Categorical' command, that is, a law of inherent and unconditional obligation, overriding all considerations of prudence, personal affection, or general utility, and asserting its own supreme authority over all other precepts and injunctions whatsoever. Putting aside the consideration of external things, the authority thus made known to us by internal revelation erects its throne in the soul of man, and judges, not the outward

act, but the motives and intentions which lead to it and solely constitute its moral character. Compliance with the dictates of this internal monitor is the only Absolute Good made known to man ; that is, a good will, dictated solely by reverence for the Moral Law, irrespective of any outward consequences, is good in and for itself alone, and not for what it produces, not for its utility, not through its fitness for any higher end, for there is no higher end. It is therefore to be prized infinitely higher than that which gratifies any desire, higher even than the satisfaction of all our desires taken together. All other goods are merely relative ; that is, the attainment of them is to be sacrificed without hesitation whenever they come in conflict with the Moral Law. Every other form of law, whether human or divine, whether it is announced as the law of the land or as the law of God, is binding upon man only so far as it is sanctioned and enforced by this higher law within the breast. The action is not right because God commands it, but God commands it because it is right.

Now I say that the existence of this “Categorical Imperative,” this absolute injunction of the Moral Law as supreme in authority and universal in obligation, irrespective of any outward consequences whatsoever, is a fact which could not have been discovered by the cognitive faculties of man in their

ordinary and unaided mode of operation, but must have been first made known, like the structure of language and the uses of fire, by what may be called a divine instinct or a special revelation. If known to have been first announced by an audible voice from heaven, under circumstances as impressive as those which, according to the Jewish scripture, attended the communication of the law at Sinai, its immediate divine origin would be universally admitted. And if, instead of a trumpet call from above accompanied by the earthquake and the fire, the will of God comes to man as "a still small voice" from within the mind, constantly repeated, and making known to him his duty on all occasions, shall we say that its divine origin and authority are any the less obvious?

But I did not intend to discuss at length this subject of a primitive revelation to mankind, but only to point it out as one of many important problems the thorough investigation of which may be greatly aided by attentive study of the philosophy of the Bible.

We have next to enumerate and consider separately those primitive and fundamental truths respecting the universe, man, and God, and their relations to each other, which underlie these three revelations, and constitute what I have called the philosophy both of the Hebrew and Christian

Scriptures. The first of them was grandly announced in the solemn declaration by Moses, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." It was repeated in the first law of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" or more clearly, according to the reading in the Septuagint, "no other gods but me." This great truth, the unity of God, is the first peculiar feature of the philosophy of the Bible. It was not first made known by Moses, but appears from the account in Genesis to have been equally the undoubted faith of Abraham and the other patriarchs; and it is assumed, or taken for granted, through the whole history and all the literature of the Jews. It has been their distinctive national faith during the whole period, about 3500 years, of their existence as a separate and peculiar people. What were the condition and the belief of the other nations of the earth, even those who had the most culture and refinement, during the first half of this long period? Throughout the night of ages that preceded modern civilization, polytheism or fetichism was the prevailing faith of mankind, as it still is of those tribes and races upon whom the light of Christianity has not dawned. The classic nations of antiquity erected altars and temples to that crowd of coarse, vindictive, and licentious gods and goddesses whom all the glories of Grecian poetry and art could not

ennoble, nor all the refinements of modern speculation allegorize into decency. Egypt bowed down before its deified dogs, cats, and bulls. Assyria worshipped its winged and human-headed lions, its sphinxes, and its monsters with the body and arms of a man united with the head of an eagle or vulture, and with the tail of a dragon or fish. The Magians worshipped fire, or divided their homage between Ormuzd and Ahriman, which are but synonyms for the good Deity and the Evil One. In India, the dreamy and meditative spirit of the people forged monstrous schemes of theology and cosmogony which Hume fitly characterized as "the playful whimsies of monkeys in human shape," and which Southey has vainly tried to elevate into poetry in the "Curse of Kehama."

In this long and dreary night, one race alone — and one by no means the most distinguished for art, learning, and refinement — upheld the torch of a spiritual faith and a belief in the one true God. The Hebrew theology appears in those remote ages, amid the otherwise universal prevalence of the grossest idolatry, as a miraculous light "streaking the darkness radiantly." I do not need here to insist upon anything in the literature or the history of this wonderful people which has been called into doubt by the subtle questionings of modern scepticism. I throw overboard for the



nonce to the unbeliever the Book of Genesis and all the contested points in the history of the Jews. I will take only the Psalms, which, as products of the Hebrew mind of a very high antiquity, whether they were all written by David or not, no scholar has ever thought of questioning. Many of them are undoubtedly as old as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, some are probably much older. Contrast their pure and sublime monotheism with the theogony of Homer and Hesiod, and with the popular gods of Egypt and India; and account for it, if you can, consistently with the laws of the human mind, and with the history of human progress in civilization, philosophy, and religion, without the aid of immediate inspiration or an antecedent revelation.

But what we are here specially concerned to remark is, that monotheism is the only possible form of theism properly so called, and that any scheme of polytheism, even the dualism of the Manichæan belief, is self-contradictory and absurd, being a denial of the essential attributes which constitute our only idea of Deity. Either there is but one God, or there is no God at all, but only two or more limited, finite, and derivative beings, each negating the infinity and omnipotence of the other. Neither can be self-sustaining, increate, indestructible, and almighty, except by reducing the other to insignificance. The reasoning of Spinoza

is irrefutable : there cannot be two infinite beings, since there would always be one thing which neither of them could do, namely, to destroy the other. Hence the word is in truth a proper name, and since it was not commonly so understood, the Hebrews were right in giving Him a special and distinctive appellation. "And God spake unto Moses and said unto him, I am Jehovah ; and I appeared unto Abraham, and unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty ; but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them." *Exod.* vi. 2, 3. And again, in the 83d Psalm, "That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the Most High over all the earth." Then the Hebrews were right again, in putting this sublime doctrine of the unity of God in the foreground, as the first truth of their philosophy and theology, and as the basis on which all the other truths depend.

The second of these fundamental truths is best expressed in the emphatic declaration of our Lord, "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It was enforced in the second law of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth." In accordance with this prohibition, the theology of the Hebrews throughout their whole history is dis-



tinguished by nothing so much as by their horror of anthropomorphism, or rather of attributing to Deity any definite shape or likeness whatsoever. Every other nation on earth worshipped God under some bodily image or similitude, and therefore raised to him statues or representations in stone, wood, or iron. To the Jews alone this was the unpardonable sin of idolatry, for it was a limitation, or rather a denial, of the infinity of God. The injunction in the Decalogue is simply an enforcement of that grand doctrine of the omnipresence of Deity which underlies the most sublime passages of Hebrew poetry. You might open the Old Testament almost at random for confirmations of this remark. Take the following from the 139th Psalm : “ Whither shall I go from thy spirit ? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence ? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there : if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” Again, in Solomon’s sublime prayer at the dedication of the Temple : — “ But will God indeed dwell on the earth ? Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee ; how much less this house that I have builded ? ” Even where God appears most directly in intercourse with man, as in speaking face to

face with Moses or with Job, He comes not in any visible shape, but only as a voice in the inward ear, a voice out of the bush, or out of the fire, or out of the whirlwind. And that there may be no mistake on this cardinal point, the people were reminded in Deuteronomy (iv. 15), "for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire;" therefore "take good heed unto yourselves, lest you make any graven image, the similitude of any figure; and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them and serve them."

We find, where we should least expect it, in the great Roman historian who was nearly a contemporary of our Lord, a striking account of this peculiarity in the doctrine and institutions of the Jews, though it evidently caused him more astonishment than admiration. In the fifth book of his *Histories*, before beginning his account of the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Titus, Tacitus gives a preliminary sketch of the character and origin of the Jewish people, which in some respects is candid and faithful, though the errors in it are enough to prove that it was compiled from hearsay and vulgar rumor, and not from direct examination of the Hebrew sacred books. After glancing at the supposed

reasons for their hebdomadal division of time, and for the observance of the weekly Sabbath and the Sabbatical year, he goes on to say, they believe that "the souls are immortal of those who fall in battle or are put to death by their conquerors; hence they are pleased with the increase of their numbers, and they are fearless of death. After the Egyptian fashion, they bury the bodies of the dead instead of burning them. Also, they have the same belief and rites as the Egyptians regarding Hades or the underworld, but differ from them in respect to celestial beings, or the heavens above us. For the Egyptians worship many animals and images made by hand; but the Jews hold that there is only one God, that he is pure mind or spirit, (*Iudæi mente sola unumque numen intelligunt*,') and that those are impious who, out of perishable materials, fashion images of gods in the likeness of men. They believe this God to be supreme, eternal, inimitable because without form, and imperishable. Therefore they allow no statues in their cities, nor even in their temples; they will not pay this flattery to kings, nor even to the Roman emperors." He subsequently adds, that "Pompey was the first of the Romans who subdued the Jews, and exercised his right as conqueror by entering their temple; and it thus became known that it contained no divine similitude, but the innermost shrine was tenantless

and bare : ” “ *nulla intus deum effigie vacuum sedem et inania arcana.* ”

The third primary truth of the philosophy of the Bible is the simple affirmation, God made the world. “ In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. ” Here are no metaphysical subtleties about something being generated from nothing, but it is obviously implied that the creation thus spoken of was one of order out of confusion, of a cosmos out of chaos ; since it is said in the second verse of the account, “ And the earth was without form and void, ” that is, was shapeless and empty ; “ and darkness was upon the face of the deep ; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light ; and there was light. ” The unequalled majesty and force of this description so impressed Longinus, a Pagan philosopher and rhetorician of the third century of our era, that he cites the words, in his treatise on the Sublime, as a striking instance of sublimity in discourse ; but the citation must have been made from memory, without sight of the text, as he adds to the quotation this clause, which really enfeebles it by repetition, “ Let the earth be, and the earth was : ” — words not to be found in Genesis, though they are contained in a passage in the Apocrypha. (2 Esdras xvi. 55.)

We have here to look only at the face of the ac-

count and at the primal truths which may underlie it, disregarding the details which have given rise to so much vain speculation in theology and science. Thus viewed, it must be obvious to any one, I think, that the first three chapters of Genesis contain an ancient Hebrew poem, or rather the fragments of several such poems somewhat imperfectly dovetailed together, in praise of the Creator, and embodying in an imaginative form the national faith respecting the act of creation and the primitive state of man on earth. These are no more to be construed literally into articles of belief than are the first three books of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which are a sort of modern version or imitation of them. It has all the marks of such poetry, — parallelism of thought and diction, division into irregular stanzas each having a sort of refrain, magnificence of imagery, and vivid personifications. Take, for instance, the fourth stanza, or as it is here called, the work of the fourth day; it is all aglow with stateliness of phraseology, picturesque repetitions, and liveliness of imaginative detail. "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven, to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights;



the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also." I must abridge the lyric repetitions, and pass at once to the refrain, "and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day." Now to treat this magnificent passage as plain didactic prose, and to inquire curiously what language was used when "God said;" or how the sun and moon came first to be created three days after light itself was generated; or how long a period of time was embraced in what is here called "the fourth day," is a mode of interpretation which is enough to drive frantic one who has any feeling for poetry, or any reverence for the Bible. The next time either believing or infidel geologists come to discuss the exact meaning of the six days required for the work of creation, gravely supposing that such speculations involve the validity of the faith of Christendom, I hope they will also consider the complaint of Job, when he was being talked to death by his three tormentors: "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. O that ye would altogether hold your peace; and it should be your wisdom." The Hebrew poet, devoutly attached to his weekly Sabbath and Sabbatical year, carried back in idea these institutions to the foundation of the earth, and made the septennial division of time, marking out the periods of



labor and repose, one of the imaginative embellishments of his record of the creation of the world; though he was fully aware that, to the infinite and omnipotent God, whom he worshipped, the very words *work* and *rest* have no meaning, and are really profane. One might as well take literally the sublime declaration in Job, that, at the creation, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

But are we not thus sublimating the truths of God's word into the idle fancies and poetical imaginings of mortal men? Certainly not. Remember what has been already said, that we are dealing not directly with a revelation, but with the record of a revelation, a record which is at least 500 years older than Homer. Poetry is older than prose. In that early age, history, morality, and religion, all the thoughts of men, assumed the outward form of poetry as their natural garb. The kernel of truth always had a framework of imaginative surroundings. Within these few last years, the marvellous discoveries of Dr. Schliemann have proved, that what Homer, Æschylus, and Sophocles wrote were not mere idle tales, but genuine traditions of historical personages and real facts. Under the poetry of Genesis and Exodus, if we are not slaves to the letter, it is easy to penetrate to the spirit which lies beneath, and to discern the sober

features of truth lit up by the vivid coloring of the imagination. This Hebrew cosmogony, this old, old story

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world and all our woe,

is not more poetical than it is instructive. Verse has generally been the outward form of the oracles of God; the inspiration of the poet is naturally connected with that of the lawgiver, the religious reformer, the priest, and the seer. Truth is taken home, is lodged in the memory, and affects the life, only so far as it stirs the emotions and touches the heart. And when the record is studied for edification at a later day, it must be studied as poetry, and not as prose; we must penetrate to the heart of the flower, in order to reach the fruit.

This oldest and most inspired of all poems teaches plainly enough, first, as has been said, that God made the world; next, that creation was not a single act completed as soon as it was begun, but that it extended through many stages, covering vast periods of time; and finally that it culminated in the birth of man. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." This agrees with the account given in the earlier version of the poem, where we read, "And

God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Herein is plainly taught the distinct personality both of man and God, and that each is a spiritual being capable of holding intercourse with the other, that is, of imparting and receiving commands. For as Plato tells us in the concluding sentence of the *Timæus*, ὁδε ὁ κόσμος, "this orderly arranged universe, having received animals both mortal and immortal, and being filled with them, has become the sensible image of the intelligible God, and thereby of what is greatest, best, fairest, and most perfect." The whole account of Eden, which follows, teaches clearly that man is created innocent and pure, with a revelation through his conscience of God's law of holiness; but that the temptations of appetite and passion, the lusts of the flesh, are too strong for him, and he falls into disobedience and sin, with all their sad consequences,

"With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us and regain the blissful seat."

All this is taught by the poet under the lively allegory of the serpent tempting the mother of mankind, which is no more to be construed literally than the corresponding passage in Milton, where he represents personified Sin and Death as guarding the portal to the infernal regions; the underlying truth to the story of the enticement in Eden

being the treacherous approaches of sin through wicked thoughts dallying with temptation. In a like imaginative manner, the writer thus sets forth the shame which follows the awakening of conscience and the detection of guilt: "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." This is only saying, what all Christian moralists admit, that the voice of conscience is the voice of God.

It has been falsely charged that it is an anthropathic conception of Deity to represent him as holding intercourse directly with the human soul. But it is not so to one who believes, what the Bible teaches throughout, the distinct personality both of God and man, that each is a spirit, and each may communicate with the other spiritually, through the inward ear, while the organs of sense are closed, or do not exist. All of this is involved in the doctrine and practice of silent prayer. It is anthropomorphism and idolatry to think of God as being in the outward likeness of a man; but it is piety and truth to believe that man is made in the spiritual likeness of God. And this I would rank as the fourth primitive truth distinctly taught throughout the successive revelations of which we have a broken and fragmentary record in our English Bible.

The fifth fundamental truth clearly taught in each of these three revelations is the grand declaration that God governs the world in righteousness. Properly considered, it is the most important of them all. The other three are the foundations of the theology, that is, of the doctrine concerning God, which was or is held by the patriarchs, and by the Hebrew and the Christian alike. But they are merely intellectual truths, like the primary maxims concerning time, space, and number, which are the foundations of metaphysics and mathematics, and like these again, not necessarily or immediately affecting the conduct or the life of men. I may believe with my whole soul, as firmly as I do in the multiplication table, that God is one, that he is a spirit, and that he made the world ; and still hold with the Epicurean and the agnostic, that for all we know to the contrary, his work was completed at the creation, and that ever since he has remained apart, not regarding the affairs of men or in any way interfering with the course of things in the universe. But this fifth truth, solemnly proclaimed in each of the three Biblical revelations, is the basis not only of a theology, but of a religion. It is a practical truth, and not one of mere speculation. It is the most momentous truth ever sounded in the hearing of man. The announcement ‘God governs the earth in righteousness’ means that he



has made known his will and his law unto men, and that the whole course of events, both in outward nature and in the human soul, is a manifestation and an enforcement of that divine law. The covenant which the Lord made with Moses and the people of Israel was, that it should be well with the righteous and ill with the wicked; and their faith that this covenant was binding, and would be rigidly kept, pervades all their literature and furnishes a key to their whole history. Their lawgivers, their psalmists, and their prophets teach but one lesson; they only reiterate what was the faith of Abraham and the word which was spoken by Moses at Sinai. "Know therefore this day and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and his commandments which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, forever."

So strong was the belief of the Jews in the enforcement of the divine law during the present life of man on the earth, that they do not seem to have thought of the probability of a future life beyond the grave. Save the questionable interpretation of one or two obscure phrases, there is not the slight-



est proof in the Old Testament that the Hebrews, before the period of the Captivity, ever thought of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Even so late a writer as Ecclesiastes, probably subsequent to the Captivity, seeming to allude to the primeval sentence pronounced after the fall from Eden, says in his usual gloomy fashion, "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" And again, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." At the time of the Saviour, as is known, the large and influential sect of the Sadducees positively rejected the doctrine of the resurrection; and even the Pharisees seem to have entertained it only as a doubtful speculation, as one guess among many, and not as a certified belief. Only the doctrine and the resurrection of our Lord brought life and immortality to light. Why should the Jews before his time have entertained this doctrine, when they believed so firmly, that holiness carried with it its own blessings, and sin bore its own punishment, in the life that now is? Whatever misfortunes befell them, if their crops failed, if pestilence came among them, or if they were delivered into the hands of their enemies, they acknowledged that it was be-

cause they had sinned, because they had forgotten the commandments of the Lord their God, and only through repentance and reformation could they look for returning prosperity. Even though appearances were against them, they were strong in believing that "the just shall live by faith." As their prophet (Habakkuk) grandly told them, "*Although* the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; YET will I rejoice in the Lord, I will JOY in the God of my salvation." This is the great truth which is recognized and expressly taught even in all worldly systems of utilitarianism, and as such is accepted and formulated by such men as John S. Mill and Herbert Spencer. They too inculcate morality because it is useful, useful both to society and to the individual; that is, because a blessing goes along with it. But their system is an inversion of the true doctrine. They hold that the action is right because it is useful; whereas conscience and the Bible declare, that it is useful because it is right. Even Matthew Arnold talks of "that stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil the law of their being;" of that "stream of tendency, the Eternal not-ourselves, which makes for righteousness." This is teaching

the doctrine of the moral government of the world, but with a fantastic endeavor to cover up both the personality and the name of the Divine Governor, the God of righteousness, in a meaningless abstraction.

According to this doctrine of Hebrew philosophy, even the external aspect of the life that now is becomes the visible expression of the sovereignty of God ; and this sovereignty may be regarded as the sixth fundamental truth taught in the Scriptures. He reigns supreme ; He is the Lord God of Sabaoth, the ruler of nations, the king whose majesty, dominion, and power are revealed in every outward event and in the whole course of human affairs. He binds the sweet influences of Pleiades and looseth the bands of Orion. He is the king of glory, the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle.

Over against this grand conception of the majesty of Jehovah, and of the immediacy of his government of the whole earth, yet not as abrogating but as supplementing it, and bringing it nearer to the hearts and consciences of men, is placed the Christian idea of God as "Our Father," who pitieth his children, who forgiveth their sins and healeth their iniquities, whose loving kindness and tender mercies are over all his works. To the Jew, God is king ; to the Christian, God is love. The promi-

ment idea of the whole New Testament is the fatherhood of God and the consequent brotherhood of men. The whole decalogue is summed up in the emphatic declaration of Jesus Christ: — “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Recapitulating, we find these seven fundamental truths underlying the three successive revelations of which the Bible purports to be the more or less perfect record: —

1. God is one.
2. God is a spirit.
3. God made the world.
4. The distinct personality both of man and God, so that each is a spiritual being capable of holding intercourse with the other.
5. God governs the world in righteousness, rewarding those who keep, and punishing those who disobey, His commands.
6. In each of His functions, as Creator, Sovereign, Lawgiver, and Judge, God is love.
7. As he is our Father, all mankind are our brethren; and the whole duty of man is summed up in the comprehensive injunction,

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself.

It is obvious that these seven simple truths, if taken together, cease to be a mere philosophy, and already constitute a theology and a religion. Considered separately, each one may be regarded, perhaps, as only a philosophical or ethical truth, which may be confirmed by reasoning from the light of nature; though all of them could not have been collectively first discovered and established by any such process; certainly not then and there, when they were originally announced. And it is as a revelation from God, and not as a discovery of human reason, that they are taught in the Bible; for they are therein proclaimed and inculcated as by authority from heaven, and not simply reasoned out as conclusions from certain premises. They are published in the simple formula, "Thus saith the Lord." He who accepts them as such may properly be said to believe that the Bible *contains* the word of God, whatever other ingredients, claiming no such authority, may be found in it when considered merely as an aggregate of early Hebrew literature. Such foreign elements may rightfully be subjected to searching examination and criticism, often to disparaging and destructive criticism; since I do not see why Jewish literature should be exempted from the application of such scrutiny any more than the

literature of any other nation, say of the Hindoos or the Greeks.

But the distinctive element of Christianity, as its very name imports, is not merely the authoritative presentation of these truths, but the perfect exemplification of them in a living form, in the matchless Idea incarnate, the person of Jesus Christ. In his life, his character, acts, and discourses, to which no parallel or approximation can be found in any other history or literature, we behold the perfect manifestation of the truth that God is love, and the enforcement of his own injunction, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." The doctrines which he taught, the commands which he uttered, and the incidents in his earthly career form one uniform and harmonious whole, every portion of which illustrates and confirms every other portion. The Sermon on the Mount and the Parables are the expression of his life, and are summed up in his prayer when dying upon the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And what a character and life are here presented for our contemplation, in its union of humility with majesty, of the human with the divine! Such a Person could not pass across the stage of the world's history without leaving, as he has done, an ineffaceable imprint on all subsequent ages; without becoming, what he has



been, a prime factor in the life and civilization of the human race. He has given a new meaning to the spirit which constitutes our true being and to the doctrine of its immortality. In the highest sense of the phrase, he has illuminated life and incorruption.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE POETRY OF THE BIBLE.

I PASS now from the philosophy to the poetry of the Bible. This is hardly a change of theme; for the only subject of Hebrew poetry, the only matter which the Hebrew poets have before them, is that body of grand fundamental truths which has just been analyzed as underlying equally the three revelations recorded in the Scriptures. They sing nothing else than the unity and infinity of God, his spiritual being, his distinct personality, his creation of the world, and his government of the world in righteousness. They have no epics, seldom any narrative, and no proper drama, though the Book of Job is in the dramatic form, while its purport is theological discussion. All their poetry is lyric, devotional, and hortatory or didactic. From a very early day, the Jews seem to have possessed a number of musical instruments, of which they were probably the inventors, though we know little about their peculiar construction, and nothing of their modes of musical composition. Accompanied by these instruments, the singers and Levites appear

to have intoned or chanted their psalms and other sacred songs, often having double choirs, who answered each other alternately, processions and dances being frequently added. The poetry of the Hebrew Prophets, however, could not have been originally sung, but must have been declaimed or recited. As is always the case in very ancient times, nearly all the literature, even that which is chiefly historical, legislative, or didactic, seems naturally to lapse into poetry, instead of preserving rigidly the sober form of prose. Thus, not only in the historical books, but in those chiefly occupied with the details of the Hebrew ritual, we often find snatches of song, and other passages which are evidently derived from earlier poems that have not been preserved, as the poetical coloring remains. In the 25th chapter of the first Book of Chronicles is an elaborate account of David's institution of numerous choirs, who were instructed in the songs of the Lord, "with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order." I do not place much stress upon this account, however, as the date of the Books of Chronicles is uncertain, and is probably much later than the time of David.

But in spite of its connection with music, Hebrew poetry comes to us only in the form of poetical and rhythmical prose. It seems entirely destitute of

proper metrical arrangement, that is, of the regular recurrence of similar feet disposed in various rhythms, such as we find in all Greek and Latin poetry. Some think that in the ancient mode of pronouncing the Hebrew language, such measures may have existed ; but this true pronunciation being irretrievably lost, no trace of the original metre can now be discerned. To our ears, the only distinctive feature of Hebrew poetry, its parallelism, is just as obvious in a translation as in the original ; for it is a rhythm, not of sound, whether accent or quantity, but of thought and sentiment. The leading thought is expressed usually in couplets, sometimes in triplets, of which the first member really contains the guiding idea, and the second, — or the second and third, as the case may be, — simply repeats this thought, or amplifies it, or balances it by reply or contrast. Usually, the second member corresponds to the earlier one not only in thought, but in the form of expression, whereby the similarity or contrast is, as it were, emphasized. The pendulum of the clock seems to beat in periods of two or three measures, returning after the completion of each to the starting point for a new departure. This peculiarity of Hebrew poetry can be better explained by an example than by analysis and description. I gladly take for illustration a part of the magnificent description, in the 18th Psalm, of the Lord God

coming to succor the righteous in their distress, the imagery being mainly taken from a thunderstorm. I adopt the language of the Common Version as slightly modified by Dr. Noyes, in order to bring out more distinctly the parallelism of which the earlier translators were not observant.

“In my distress, I called upon the Lord,  
And cried unto my God.

“He heard my voice out of his temple,  
And my cry came before him, into his ears.

“Then the earth shook and trembled ;  
The foundations of the hills rocked and were shaken,  
Because his wrath was kindled.

“There went up a smoke out of his nostrils,  
And fire out of his mouth devoured ;  
Coals were kindled by it.

“He bowed the heavens also, and came down ;  
And darkness was under his feet.

“He rode upon a cherub, and did fly ;  
Yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.

“He made darkness his covering,  
His pavilion round about him was dark waters and thick  
clouds of the skies.

“At the brightness before him his thick clouds passed away ;  
Then came hailstones and coals of fire.

“The Lord also thundered from heaven,  
And the Most High uttered his voice,  
Amid hailstones and coals of fire.

“He sent forth his arrows and scattered them,  
He shot out lightnings and discomfited them.

“Then the channels of the deep were seen,  
And the foundations of the earth were laid bare,

“At thy rebuke, O Lord,  
At the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.

“He stretched forth his hand from above,  
And drew me out of deep waters.

“He delivered me from my strong enemy,  
From my adversaries who were too powerful for me.”

I know not anything in all Greek, Latin, or English poetry, that matches the sublimity and grandeur, the magnificent sweep, of this description of the providence of God as manifested in the phenomena of nature. It is Hebraistic to the core; Gentile poetry has nothing like it.

Thus far I have considered only what may be called the external characteristics of Hebrew poetry; that is, its pervading lyrical form, its lack of any proper metrical arrangement, and its parallelisms in thought and sentiment. Its internal peculiarities, which are strongly marked, and by which it is



broadly distinguished from the poetry of any other nation, are all clearly traceable, as it seems to me, to the nature of the subject of which it treats. With a single exception, Hebrew poetry has but one theme, which is a very broad and grand one; this is, the providence of God, or as otherwise expressed, the dealings of God with man. The exception referred to is the Book of Canticles, or Solomon's Song as it is often called, which, as a mere love poem, though a very beautiful one, seems to have no better claim than the idylls of Theocritus, or the amatory verses of Catullus, to a place in the Jewish Scriptures, except as it is in the Hebrew language. Putting this book aside, therefore, all the poetry of the Old Testament is devotional in tone, and treats of the moral government of the world. It thus has to speak of the duty and the destiny of man as affected by the commands and promises, by the character and attributes, of the Almighty. This is at once the grandest and most interesting theme which can be presented for human contemplation. The unity and infinity, together with the holiness, of God are topics which the Hebrew poets are never weary of enforcing. Hence their sustained loftiness of expression, their grandeur of conception, the unequalled majesty and force of their style. The truths which they have to present are of no doubtful import, are no

matters of human speculation, but are absolute and eternal; they express the unchangeable purposes of the infinite One, of Him who created and governeth all things. The ideas of eternity and infinity, of absolute holiness, justice, and truth, are the most awful and impressive that can be placed before the human mind. They not only stimulate the imagination, but produce the emotions of sublimity and awe which no other theme can equally generate. It is on this account that Hebrew poetry stands alone in all literature. Except so far as admiration of it has induced in modern times attempts to imitate it, and has thus created such poems as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Byron's *Cain*, there is not only nothing second to it, but nothing like it in the whole recorded range of human thought. These imitations are certainly great efforts of human genius; but like most imitations, they are but distant and faint reflections, copies in water, of a grand original. In them, mere fancy is constantly usurping the functions of the imagination. Hence the whole framework or machinery of Dante's poem is fantastic and absurd; we cannot accept it, it produces no illusion, we only pardon it for the sake of the poetry with which it is surrounded. The plot and most of the incidents either of Milton's or Byron's work are equally unreal and extravagant; when stripped of their poet-

ical garb and presented naked to the thought, they are seen to border closely on the grotesque.

These doctrines respecting the nature and attributes of the Deity, moreover, are not presented merely as abstract truths, but in the concrete, as constantly manifested in the course of outward events and in the conduct of human affairs. They are presented as practical truths, affecting the heart and the life, and shining out in all the phenomena of the external universe. Hence, more than any other poetry, that of the Hebrews lies near to nature, paints its scenes, and reflects all its varied aspects. The course of the stars is God's ordinance, and every member of the vegetable and animal kingdom testifies to his greatness and obeys his law. He "alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea." He "binds the sweet influences of the Pleiades and loosens the bands of Orion." The God whom the Hebrews worshipped is he "Who layeth the beams of his chamber in the waters, who maketh the clouds his chariot, and walketh on the wings of the wind." "He shut up the sea with doors, and caused the dayspring to know its place." "The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars, yea, it breaketh the cedars of Lebanon." "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills." "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God." He

clotheth the neck of the horse with thunder ; “ he causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man.” “ O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches.”

All of this is so peculiar and distinctive of the manner of the Hebrew poets, that if I had not mentioned the sources whence these extracts are taken, any person would immediately have recognized them as drawn from the Bible. All of them are based upon those fundamental truths which underlie the revelations recorded in the Bible. The spirit of polytheism is entirely different ; that of pantheism and materialism points in the opposite direction. You find little or nothing in all Greek and Latin poetry of this sublimity of conception, this grandeur of utterance, this close sympathy with nature. To Homer and Virgil, the outward universe does not reflect the character, or move responsive to the wishes, of the dwellers on Olympus. At most, they exercise only a fitful and limited dominion over it. Indeed, if it did mirror their character and attributes, it would be far less good, less pure and bright, than it now appears ; since the action of these deities is such, that if brought before one of our police courts for licentious and immoral conduct, it would go hard with all of them. The pantheistic theory, because ex-

clusively metaphysical, is vague and dreamy; it does not come near to life, or touch individual events, but affects one with a painful sense of the unreality of all things. Hence it is wholly unsuited to the purposes of poetry, which requires the particular and the concrete. Materialism is still more destructive of the essence of poetry, as it is gross and mechanical. It offers us a wooden universe, in which there is neither mind nor spirit, but brute force and blind necessity govern all things. Lucretius announced the whole philosophy of materialism nearly two thousand years ago.

“ The Gods, the Gods !

If all be atoms, how then should the Gods,

Being atomic, not be dissoluble,

Not follow the great law ? ”

— TENNYSON'S *Lucretius*.

The philosophy of the Hebrews, on the contrary, is eminently spiritual and human. Through its pure and noble morality, it touches the feelings, wakens the affections, and guides the life. Even the Decalogue, broad, just, and unerring though it be in defining the limits of right and wrong, is but a partial expression of the moral law. As a judicial system, aiming to define and establish the relations between the human and divine, and between man and man, it lays down only the duties of perfect and universal obligation, leaving the



guidance of the humane affections for another portion of the code. Hence it furnishes only a foundation for ethics; it expresses the law of justice, but not as yet the law of love. It is therefore supplemented even in the Mosaic code by injunctions which touch more directly the heart and the life, since they are an anticipation of the spirit of Christian morality. In the same portion of the Book of Exodus which contains the Ten Commandments, we find also these precepts: (xxii. 21-24; xxiii. 4-8.) "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot, . . . and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." And in the same spirit is the terrible imprecation of the Psalmist upon the wicked man:—"Let there be none to extend mercy upon him, neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children; *Because* that he remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart." In the directions for the Sabbatical year, it is written, "But the seventh year, thou shalt let the land rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field



shall eat." And again: "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not; for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift; for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous."

This pure and beautiful morality, this sympathy with all living things, but especially with the weak, the needy, and the unfortunate, is the source of what is tender and pathetic in Hebrew poetry, which is its second great characteristic, and one which forms a chief feature of the Book of Psalms. What is distinctive in it is that it aims to direct the outward conduct only by correcting the spirit which is within, by purifying the heart and cultivating all the kindly affections. Hence it has nothing of the formalism and stiffness of ethical theory, but finds its natural expression, without effort or straining, in kind words and deeds and the formation of a beautiful character. It is the Christian virtue described by St. Paul in the single word rendered by our translators as *charity*, though its meaning is not limited to mere alms-giving, but properly stands for *universal love*, so that it coincides with the excellence which John is never weary of inculcating.

It is undoubtedly the element which Christianity has added to the civilization of the world.

The earliest poetry found in the Bible consists of the triumphal songs and fragments of song which are interspersed in the Pentateuch and other ancient books of the Old Testament. Such are the exultant chant of Moses and Miriam after crossing the Red Sea, the song of Deborah and Barak, the songs of blessing uttered by Jacob and Moses when on their death-beds, the lamentation of David over Saul and Jonathan, and the fragments which constitute the story of creation and the fall, together with the legend of Balaam and Balak. These are specially interesting not only on account of their intrinsic merits, their marvellous grandeur, boldness, and imaginative force, but because they contain the materials of history, because they represent, so to speak, the process of history in the making. Traditions respecting the earlier life of a nation are naturally embodied in popular ballads and songs, such as those from which Livy is supposed to have extracted his legendary story of ancient Rome. These have perished, and Macaulay has tried to reproduce them in his spirited *Lays*. English and Scotch ballads of a far later day answer a similar purpose. Such ballads are the best material for the dawn of history, as they cannot be counterfeited. Handed down from father to son by fre-

quent repetition, they have the true ring of genuineness; they are faithful and lively pictures of a people's infant life. They reproduce in vivid coloring the men and the events of the olden time. Such are the poetical fragments which we find in the Pentateuch and the Book of Judges. I cannot doubt the substantial verity of the great events of which these noble songs are a contemporaneous and graphic, though imperfect, record. Doubtless there are poetical exaggerations and embellishments in them; this follows from the very nature of ancient ballad poetry. (So in Chevy Chase.) Correct statistics, plain and exact narratives of facts, do not belong to hoar antiquity. The record is magnified by national pride; it is gilded by the warm hues of the imagination. Allowances must be made in interpreting it; but substantial truth lies beneath. In studying the earlier history of Greece and Rome, we make such deductions and admissions as a matter of course, without giving up our faith in the general accuracy of the accounts. No one doubts that the Greeks had a naval victory at Salamis, and triumphed against great odds at Plataea; but I suppose no scholar believes Herodotus when he states that the armament which Xerxes led into Greece consisted of more than two millions of fighting men. The number of Persians who were defeated by a handful of Greeks at Marathon is variously said by

different historians to have been from 110,000 to over half a million; but we do not therefore deny that a great battle was then and there fought. Going back to a period nearly a thousand years before Marathon and Plataea, one may reasonably refuse to believe that the Hebrews whom Moses led out of Egypt in one day and night numbered about 600,000 men, besides women and children; or that this vast multitude, with their flocks and herds, "even very much cattle," subsisted for forty years in the wilderness. But we do not thereby abate our faith in the general correctness of the story of the Exodus as told in the Pentateuch, or in the miraculous nature of the revelation at Sinai. Jewish institutions, like the feasts of the Passover and the Tabernacles, which have been handed down by constant tradition through the lapse of over 3,000 years, our Christian institution of the Lord's Supper being in some sort a continuation of the former of them, supply collateral and irrefutable proof that the story is authentic; belief in it permeates all Hebrew literature and Hebrew life. And the grand triumphal song of Moses and Miriam, the oldest still extant poetry that was ever sung, confirms the legend and brings the main incident in it vividly before us. Such an inspired creation cannot have been the forgery of a later age. In its bold and lofty imagery, its picturesque phrases, its lyric rep-

etitions, we have the genuine stamp of remote antiquity. The tramp of the Egyptian cavalry, the rush of Pharaoh's chariots of war, and the roar of mighty waters which suddenly overwhelmed them, become almost audible as we listen to the song. Not to the fugitives' own strategy or prowess, but to the might of Jehovah, of the God of Sabaoth, is the victory ascribed.

"Sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea." "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, mine hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" "But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea."

In like manner, in the inspired song of Deborah and Barak, perhaps one or two hundred years later, we have the truth of history as to the leading incidents of the narrative, whatever may be the incorrectness of the details.

"Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled,



and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water." "The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo." "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon." "Then were the horsehoofs broken by means of the prancings, the prancings of their mighty ones." "At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead." "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself. Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years."

A corresponding fragment of song, celebrating the victory of Joshua over the Amorites, has been strangely misunderstood by the literal interpreters, as if it were a prose narrative of what actually took place. Grandly the old Hebrew poet sings, —

“Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon,  
And thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.  
And the sun stood still,



And the moon stayed,  
Till the people had avenged themselves on their enemies.”

“Is not this written,” it is added, “in the book of Jasher?” Who does not recognize this as poetry, even if it had not been quoted from a book of poems? In the common language of the Hebrews, such expressions were neither bold nor unusual. If similar passages were thus literally construed, the result would be curious; as when it is said that “the hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord.” The meaning plainly is, that the sun and moon witnessed the triumph of Joshua, and while they still held their course in the heavens during one day, the victory was completed.

But the Bible has other and more continuous poetry than these ancient fragments of legendary song. About one half of the Old Testament is pure lyric poetry, mostly devotional and didactic in purport, all of it profoundly serious and majestic in tone. There is the noble collection of the Psalms, 150 in number, a large portion of which are unquestionably either by David or belonging to David's age, and so at least as old as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, while the later ones were certainly written before Herodotus was born. There is the Book of Proverbs, the earlier chapters of which are assigned by the best critics either to King Solomon or Solomon's age, while the others are not much

later ; and the unique Book of Job, the period of which is uncertain, though Renan conjectures that it belongs to the seventh or eighth century B. C. My own belief is, that with the exception of the prologue and the epilogue, which are in prose, and which were probably added or altered at a later day, the body of the poem belongs to a considerably earlier age ; it may be older than the larger portion of the Pentateuch. Then come Isaiah and the other Prophets, ranging from about 800 B. C. to a period somewhat later than the Captivity, perhaps to the fourth century B. C. We have a full Greek translation of them and of the other books of the Old Testament in the Septuagint, as it is called, executed in the third century before the Christian era.

Of course, we need not here regard Sanscrit literature, that is, the Vedas or sacred books of the Hindoos, as comparatively little is known about them, and the full consideration of them belongs only to a very few Sanscrit scholars. They are chiefly interesting in their philological aspect ; either as poetry or history they can hardly be compared with Hebrew literature. I believe the earliest of the Vedas are now held by scholars to be two or three centuries later in origin than the supposed date of the Pentateuch.

Concerning this great body of Hebrew poems,

my point is, that with respect to their antiquity, to the amount of history which is wrapped up in them, many of the Psalms and all of the Prophets being semi-historical, and to their intrinsic poetical merits, they are at least as interesting and important to scholars, even in their exclusively secular aspect, as the masterpieces of Greek literature. A system of liberal education cannot be regarded as complete without much study of them. The Psalms differ from the earlier fragments of Hebrew song especially in the amazing variety and fertility of the subjects considered in them, and in the comprehensiveness of their range. They pass through every mode of the lyre, and strike every chord of the human heart. There is hardly any devout sentiment or tender affection of which man's nature is capable to which they do not give utterance. There is no lofty topic of contemplation in the outward universe, or in the relations of God with man, which they do not set forth and elevate with new grandeur and impressiveness. Some of them, such as the 19th, the 90th, the 104th, and the 139th, are so majestic and sublime that they can hardly be read from beginning to end without awe and tears. Unhappily, as Dr. Noyes remarks, the hearing of most persons has become so accustomed to them at an early period of life, before the mind could comprehend their meaning or feel their beauty, that no

little effort is needed in later years to waken the soul afresh to the full effect which they might produce. What a sensation would they create, if they could now be brought before the world for the first time!

In the sweetness, tenderness, and trustful spirit of the earlier Psalms, in their pastoral character reflecting the scenes and incidents of nomadic life, we discern the special element which was added to Hebrew poetry by the royal bard, the shepherd-king, who rescued Israel so often from her enemies, and ruled her so long and through so many vicissitudes. Who but David can be the singer when we hear the chant, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." In nearly the first incident which is reported of David's life, we find foreshadowed the influence which his songs were to exert over restless consciences and troubled hearts through all future time. "And it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and the evil spirit departed from him." Again, in the pathetic earnestness of other royal Psalms, in their

penitent confessions and cries for pity, we see mirrored the other and darker features of David's strangely chequered character and life. His was by no means a faultless career; portions of it were deeply stained with guilt. But there was a noble, even a kingly spirit in him; his is the most deeply interesting figure in the whole Jewish record. Study the incidents in his earlier career, when Jonathan was befriending him, but Saul was trying to hunt him out like a wild beast in the wilderness, and you recognize the true chivalrous element in his character; he has the noble heart of a Christian knight-errant. And Saul, too; what a grand figure he is in the dimly lighted hall of early Hebrew history, and what tragic interest in the mournful narrative of his wasted life!

Two other of the poetical Books of the Old Testament are distinguished by a pervading tone of melancholy; they are Job and Ecclesiastes. The burden of the former is, that "although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward;" while "the Preacher" declares that "in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." But there is nothing defiant or denunciatory in the tone of either; the expression is of sadness, not of bitterness of soul. The plaint is that



of the poet, not of the pessimist. It is the tendency to melancholy which usually belongs to the poetical temperament, and seems a natural accompaniment of the highest genius. It springs from a lively imagination, and from cultivating aspirations which are so lofty that nothing earthly corresponds to them. As manifested by these old Hebrew poets, it would seem as if they were groping anxiously after the doctrine of a future life, and were not able to find it. Neither of them shows the least tendency to scepticism or unbelief; both maintain an unbroken faith throughout their troubles. The spirit expressed is always that of submission and trust. "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" And Ecclesiastes declares the conclusion of the whole matter to be, "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

The Book of Job is further remarkable because it has no connection with the customs or institutions of the Jews, or with the great events of their national history. It is rather a Semitic or Arab, than a Jewish, poem; only the language, and the grand underlying truths of the patriarchal and Mosaic revelations, are Hebrew. Even the scene is laid in the land of Uz or Idumæa, a part of Arabia; and there are no allusions to Lebanon or Carmel, or to anything which is distinctive of the climate or



geography of Judea. On this account alone, in the absence of any positive indications of the date of its composition, the body of the Book seems to me to belong to patriarchal times, and probably to be the most ancient portion of Hebrew literature. The characters and the manners described remind us rather of Abraham and Lot, than of Moses, or Samuel, or Solomon. It may well be doubted whether a Hebrew poet of a later age could have thus entirely put aside the history and the institutions of his race, could have so forgotten his pride at being one of God's chosen people, and have transported himself in imagination to the time, the place, and the life of the patriarchs.

However this may be, it is certain that the incidents, the characters, and the speeches which are described or reported are entirely the work of the imagination, and are in no sense real or historical. The Book of Job is a grand philosophical poem, not a record of actual occurrences. The subject considered is the ways of Providence in dealing with man and distributing good and evil, in this world. An eminently righteous man, highly respected as having always maintained his integrity and practised the works of love, is represented as suddenly overwhelmed with the most cruel calamities alike in his property, his family, and his person. He breaks out, as is natural, into passionate lamenta-

tions at his hard fate, and declares that it is entirely undeserved. But his three friends, who had come to condole with him, in fact aggravate his sufferings and exasperate him by maintaining unreasonably that God is just, and that Job must have been a great sinner, or such evils could not have come upon him. Long discussions ensue, not in the way of conversation, but of earnest and protracted debate. The three friends are hard and pharisaical in their discourse, and the sufferer makes head as best he may against them, repelling their unjust accusation, but not blaspheming or directly impeaching the wisdom and justice of God. At last, Jehovah himself answers Job out of the whirlwind, and sets forth in the most impressive and sublime manner his own majesty and omnipotence, teaching thereby the duty of submission and unlimited trust in the infinite One. Job humbles himself accordingly, and in the end is fully recompensed, while the three friends are sharply censured and dismissed.

Such is the slight framework upon which the author has built up the grandest philosophical poem in the literature of the world. In boldness of imagery and descriptive power, in fervid eloquence and sublimity of thought, there is nothing equal to it in the whole range of ancient and modern poetry. In our Common Version of it we clearly recognize

those qualities of style by which the language of the original, in the opinion of a great Oriental scholar, is distinguished. "The language of the Book of Job," says M. Renan, "is at once the most limpid, condensed, and classical Hebrew. We find in it all the qualities of the antique style, such as conciseness, frequent obscurity and abruptness of expression, as if the words were struck out by blows of a hammer, together with a breadth of phrase which seems always to leave some hidden meaning to be discerned, and a delightful ring like that of hard and pure metal." Let me recommend to you Renan's own masterly version of Job into the French tongue, and the learned and eloquent introduction to the study of the poem by which it is preceded.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE HISTORY CONTAINED IN THE BIBLE. — THE CHARACTER AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF MOSES.

THE whole history of the Jews, so far as it is contained in the Old Testament, may properly be said to be anterior even to the beginning of secular history. The Book of Ezra, the latest portion of it, does not bring down the narrative of events later than 450 B. C., which is probably about the time when Herodotus, who is rightly called the father of profane history, as he is the earliest professed historian whose work has come down to us entire, began to write; and the narrative is carried back by Herodotus only about one hundred years, to 546 B. C., when Cyrus conquered the kingdom of Cræsus. Of course, I put aside any consideration of the mere fragments which the industry of the learned, chiefly within the present century, has collected pertaining to the early history of India, Egypt, and Assyria; these are not so much history as broken and imperfect data which at some future time, perhaps under the light thrown upon them by the Hebrew records, may be pieced together into some-

thing like a connected narrative. Of the history of the world for at least one thousand years, beginning about 1600 B. C., the only continuous portion having any claim to genuineness and authenticity is to be found in the Books of the Old Testament.

In the countless discussions to which what is called the higher historical criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures has given rise, I do not think this fact has been sufficiently considered or allowed its due weight. These records, purporting in great part to have been made almost contemporaneously with the events narrated in them, have been scrutinized as if they had been written, under the full light of modern civilization, by scholars practised in literary art and skilled in weighing testimony, estimating numbers, and discerning the truth amid contradictory reports. But it was far otherwise. The Jewish historical Books are the rude compositions, or frequently the hasty compilations, of unlearned men, who were fond of story-telling, and remarkable for their clannish spirit, their pride of race, and the fervor of their religious faith. They are eminently inartistic. We must not expect to find in them either continuous narrative or precision of statement. Their contents are often loosely heaped together, consisting of national ballads or songs, genealogical lists, ritualistic injunctions, and fragmentary legends or vivid contemporaneous accounts

of their heroes and kings. A flood of light is thrown upon a few passages flattering to their national pride or important for their religious belief; but these are separated from each other by broad gaps in which darkness reigns. The writers evidently purpose to narrate or compile only what was specially interesting to their countrymen, or what reflected light upon their institutions and confirmed their faith. But these very faults of method, this lack of order, consecutiveness, and precision, instead of impeaching the correctness of the narrative, are proofs of its antiquity, and vouchers for the fidelity and truthfulness of its authors. They are precisely what we ought to expect in genuine memorials handed down to us from the early morning in the history of the world.

The ponderous erudition and perverse ingenuity of professorial German critics have invented any number of theories respecting the genuineness, and the particular periods of composition, of the different fragmentary materials which are rudely patched together in the historical Books of the Old Testament. No two of these hypotheses resemble each other; they are so unlike that any one may find in the heap a theory to his mind; especially as each of the authors of them, not content with differing widely from the others, is usually much at variance with himself during the intervals of publication of



his book, often painfully demolishing in the second edition the very hypothesis which he had elaborately set forth and defended in the former issue. The better class of them give most attention to summing up the labors of their predecessors, so as to make it appear, for instance, that the genuineness and early date of a certain passage are stoutly denied by six learned critics, and quite as stoutly asserted perhaps by eight others equally erudite, the compiler of these statistics seldom failing to slip in among them a compromise theory of his own. It does not seem to me that much wisdom is to be learned from these critical speculations, and I should not even have alluded to them here but for one consideration, which is, that most of the questions mooted in them, and of the arguments offered on the one side or the other, lie, so to speak, on the very surface of the text, and can be studied by you just as well in your English Bible as under the guidance of a learned German professor, be he even a De Wette or an Ewald. If you seek English help, let me recommend to you Dr. John Quarry's two Dissertations on Genesis and its Authorship, our own Dr. Stebbins's "Study of the Pentateuch," and several of Dean Stanley's later publications. You will find these works distinguished at any rate for sturdy English common sense and soundness of judgment, qualities which are not conspicuous in the writings

of German critics, whose erudition appears to have been heaped up by the shovel rather than the pen.

The Book of Genesis appears on the face of it to be a collection of poems, legends, and genealogies, which had been handed down by oral tradition from an indefinite antiquity, and which it is tolerably certain were first selected, put together, and reduced to writing in the Mosaic age, probably under the direction of Moses himself, aided by his elder brother, Aaron, and his sons. They embody the early national faith of the Semitic race in those doctrines of spiritual monotheism and a Divine Providence as manifested in the government of men on earth, which I have already designated as the patriarchal revelation. I see no way of accounting for the origin of so pure doctrine in so rude an age except through a divine instinct lodged in the hearts and consciences of men, just as language and the use of fire were first made known to them through a corresponding revelation to their intellects. The success of scholars in our own day in deciphering Egyptian papyri and cuneiform inscriptions has proved, beyond all doubt, that the traditions contained in the earlier chapters of Genesis respecting the first state of man upon the earth and the Deluge were originally common to the whole Semitic race. Only with the story of Abraham does the distinctively Hebraistic portion of the record begin.

In the Book of Exodus we find the earliest contemporaneous record of the history of the Jews as a distinct people and the development in the desert of their peculiar theocratic institutions. Here, again, there is presented to us a somewhat loose aggregate of all sorts of historical material put together without any attempt at systematic arrangement, the transitions being abrupt, and the matter left unfinished at the close of one chapter being suddenly resumed several chapters farther on. The Book opens with a tolerably complete narrative of the means by which the assent of Pharaoh to the departure of the Israelites was at last obtained, and of the consequent exodus of the whole people under the guidance of Moses and Aaron, of their passage through the Red Sea, together with the destruction of the Egyptian pursuing army them, and of other incidents in their journey until they arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai. This is followed by a confused and fragmentary record of the various portions of the Mosaic legislation, as they were successively communicated to the people with a claim of divine inspiration and authority; and by an account of the conduct of the people meanwhile, during their long stay at Sinai, preparing for their expected entry upon the promised land. The statutes are assumed throughout to be of divine origin; they are announced as revelations of the will and purpose of

Jehovah, under the prefatory formula, "Thus saith the Lord," or "the Lord spake unto Moses, saying." Some of them, especially those relating to institutions and to religious rites and ceremonies, are given with great minuteness of detail; while others are recorded only in general and vague directions.

The chief personage in the Book, and in the remaining portions of the Pentateuch, around whom the interest centres, is the commanding figure of Moses, who is, humanly speaking, the great deliverer, leader, and legislator of the Hebrew people. The work accomplished by him has no parallel in history. No other legislator, no prophet, priest, or king, ever wrought to such purpose, or with so lasting efficiency, as he did. No other one's work ever lived after him as his has done. The institutions and the laws of Cyrus the Elder, Solon, Lycurgus, Numa, Pythagoras, and a host of others, where are they? As fleeting contributions to the world's history as drops of fresh and pure rain falling upon the bosom of the great ocean, they have been swallowed up in it and lost, without having in the slightest perceptible degree lessened its bitterness. Moses lived nearly a thousand years earlier than the oldest of them, among an ignorant and despised people, fugitives then and fugitives now upon the face of the earth; and his work endured and still

endures, and we, the civilized Christian nations of the earth, are still living in the light of it, upholding some of his institutions and professing at any rate to conform our lives to some of his laws. For if they were not the institutions and the laws of God, which I am not permitted now to assume, having to look only at their secular aspect, they were at any rate, if historical evidence can establish anything, first announced and made obligatory by Moses in the desert from the top of Sinai. Our Christian Sunday set apart as a day of rest consecrated unto the Lord, and still observed, as it always has been, more or less perfectly, throughout Christendom, is only the Jewish Sabbath so little modified as to be often mistaken for it; and that was first instituted by Moses in the wilderness, no trace of it as a religious observance existing before his day. The Decalogue, first announced by him as the Law of God, is still recognized as such by all civilized nations, is still taught to our children, is still inscribed in thousands of churches, so as to be constantly before the eyes of the worshipper in a form symbolizing the two tables of stone on which it was first written when Moses brought it down from the Mount. What other work of man, if this indeed be man's work, has been as lasting and efficient as this?

But it is in its special influence on the Hebrew



race, for whom, as God's chosen people, it was primarily and exclusively designed, that the legislation of Moses has most clearly shown its wisdom and its lasting power. He formed their national character; he stamped upon them those peculiarities of faith and practice by which they have been distinguished from his day to ours. The Jews as we now behold them, scattered broadcast among the nations, but still holding themselves apart from their surroundings, refusing to mingle with the Gentiles among whom they have been compelled to make their temporary home, and still professing the faith of Abraham and obedience to "the Book of the Law," — the Jews as they are now, I say, and as they always have been, bear testimony to the wisdom and the thoroughness with which their great legislator did his work. He formed them into a church and a state unlike anything else which then existed on the face of the earth; he determined the main features of their polity for all coming time. The Jews are to this day what Moses made them. For the mere student of political science, of the origin of government, of the theory of legislation, and of the determining causes of national character, I know of no study more instructive and fruitful than that of the history, the institutions, and the laws of the Hebrew people.

Consider for a moment how far Moses was fitted



for his great undertaking by his character, his training, and his previous life. Adopted as an infant foundling by Pharaoh's daughter, he was educated in the royal household, and became learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Notwithstanding his exceptional position, he seems to have been intensely patriotic, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, not only in his attachment to the faith of Abraham, but in his sympathies with his unhappy countrymen, then enslaved under cruel taskmasters, and in a more feeble, ignorant, and debased condition than are now the Fellaheen in Egypt. His first recorded act, after attaining manhood, was killing an Egyptian whom he saw maltreating a Hebrew. To escape punishment for this deed, he was compelled to go into long exile, where he became inured to a hardy nomadic life, tending in the desert the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, a priest of Midian. His wanderings certainly extended to Mount Horeb, and probably even to the borders of Canaan. The knowledge of the wilderness thus acquired made him subsequently an excellent local guide to the Israelites, knowing where water and pasture could be had, and what might serve even for the food of man in the desert. While thus employed at Horeb, there came to him what he deemed his first revelation, the word of God to his strong faith and patriotic soul, saying, "I have surely seen the

affliction of my people which are in Egypt," how they sigh by reason of their bondage. "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt," and lead them into a good land, the land of their forefathers, Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. He had many doubts and hesitations about obeying what he naturally believed to be a divine command; for the undertaking seemed a desperate one, on account both of the feebleness of the Israelites and the natural unwillingness of Pharaoh to set free so large a body of his slaves. These fears and misgivings are faithfully recorded, and thus seem to vouch for the genuineness of the narrative, and that it was in fact written by Moses himself, since no other person could have known what was then his state of mind, or would have chronicled what seemed discreditable to the leader of so great an enterprise; but he finally conquered his timidity and reluctance, and set forth on the noble work, in which, through a thousand perils and difficulties, by the blessing of God, he finally succeeded. The exodus was accomplished, and the people conducted in safety through the Red Sea and the desert till they reached the foot of Sinai.

Here the second revelation, still more imposing and circumstantial than the former one, came unto

Moses. Looking at the record of it in its merely secular aspect, to which our present view is limited, I find no difficulty in understanding its general nature and purport. Moses had left for a while the care and direction of the people to his elder brother, Aaron, and his sons, and withdrawn alone, amid the warfare of the elements, to the top of Sinai, for the purposes of meditation upon the greatness of the task which still lay before him, and of silent communion with his God. The voice which there seemed to come to his inward ear out of the lightnings and the tempest, as he had formerly heard it from the burning bush at Horeb, seemed to say unto him virtually, — “Take this feeble band of fugitives as they are now, broken in spirit and corrupted in morals and religion by their long servitude in Egypt, and by their continued familiarity with the idolatries and wickedness of the people there, and make them a great and strong nation, fearing the Lord. Kindle in their hearts anew the faith of their father Abraham; wean them from the worship of false gods, and from their attachment to the fleshpots of Egypt; and make them walk in the ways of righteousness. Make them hardy in their habits and valiant in war, so that they may be fitted to drive out or exterminate the heathen before them, and to take possession of the good land which was promised to their fathers. Guard them

especially from contact or intermarriage with the surrounding nations, so that they may be preserved from the contagion of bad example. Isolate them and keep them pure, and my blessing shall attend them." This is the command which that strong and courageous soul seemed to hear in the mount; and we have now only to consider the wisdom of the means which were proposed for its accomplishment.

On coming down from his first stay on the mount, he had a striking and melancholy proof how far the people had become corrupted and estranged from the faith of their fathers through their long sojourn in one place and their consequent familiarity with Egyptian life and the idolatrous forms of Egyptian worship. They had induced even Aaron to make for them such an idol, that of a calf, as they had often seen worshipped in Egypt, and had bowed down before it in adoration as their deity. This revolt was quickly and sternly suppressed; but it seems to have convinced Moses that the attempt to enter upon and possess the promised land, driving out its pagan inhabitants before them, must be still postponed for some forty years, till a new generation of Israelites should have arisen, desert-born and desert-trained, made hardy and valiant by the habits of nomadic life, having no memories of the blandishments and corruptions of life in Egypt, but isolated and kept pure by the very

nature of a life in the wilderness, and educated there under the institutions and the laws which he was to announce to them as the commands of Jehovah. This surely was the idea, the forecast, of a great statesman. He was in no hurry to finish the great undertaking, and thus to secure for himself a share of the triumph in the accomplished work. With noble self-denial he told the people, that not till after his death must they attempt to cross the Jordan, and "little by little," as he assured them, to win possession of Canaan. In fact, the conquest of that country, even of Jerusalem which became its capital city, was not fully accomplished till David's time, some four hundred years afterwards. Moses knew full well that a new polity, new institutions, new laws, and a revived spiritual religion could not be made, as it were, to spring up at once out of the earth, but must have time to grow up slowly, and thus to become inrooted in the hearts and habits of the people. Hence the persistency, the abiding character, of the Mosaic legislation. During those forty years in the wilderness, Moses made the Jews what they were, what they have been during these many centuries, and what they are such as we behold them now ; — a peculiar people, isolated from all others in their habits and convictions, still clinging to the faith of Abraham in the unity of God and the divine government of the



world, and still hoping for a return to the promised land.

Our materials for forming a full and correct idea of what the institutions of Moses were are confused and incomplete, as might have been expected in view of the fact that the account of them has come down to us from so remote an antiquity, and of the changes which the manuscript must have undergone in the successive transcriptions of it during the many centuries before the comparatively modern idea of the sacredness of the text, and the great importance of preserving it inviolate, had as yet dawned upon the minds of the transcribers. Scholars tell us that none of the manuscripts of the Hebrew text now extant are older than the eleventh century of our era, and that all of these are marvelously consistent with each other, the various readings to be detected in them being few and unimportant. But granting even what perhaps we have no full right to assume, that these manuscripts correctly show what the text was as early as the beginning of our era, it is certain that it underwent many and signal changes during fourteen centuries before that date; for on comparing it with two independent standards, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Greek translation of the Septuagint, the discrepancies found are numerous and some of them of considerable significance. Some of the priestly



copyists evidently had their own ideas as to what really was the word of the Lord as delivered unto Moses; and hence they made interpolations and other changes with much freedom. A transliteration must have taken place when the Chaldee or square character was substituted for the earlier Phœnician alphabet; and this cause alone must have induced many changes of the text through mistaking one letter for another, especially when numerals were concerned. Similar errors were probably committed when the vowel points were first introduced into the manuscripts, the Hebrew having then already, and long before, passed out of use as a living and spoken language. Hence minute criticisms upon the details of the record, upon isolated statements in it found here and there in single verses or fragments of a verse, are singularly misleading and out of place. These concern at the utmost the state of preservation of the text through the many casualties to which it was exposed while coming down to us from so remote an age. They do not at all affect the correctness of the narrative taken as a whole, or the authenticity of the broad features of that revelation which it purports to record. It is only by looking away from the details of the account to its general and leading characteristics, that we can gain any correct idea of the Mosaic legislation.

The system of government which Moses first set up did not recognize either the elective or the hereditary principle as its basis, though the latter was partially admitted in determining the succession to the priestly office. The system was theocratic throughout. The Lord was the only ruler; Jehovah alone was king. Moses claimed no rank or title, demanded no observance, assumed no authority as for himself, but always appears only as the mouthpiece through whom the God of their fathers spake to the people. He was simply a prophet, not a priest, not a ruler, not even a magistrate; for though he "judged the people," that is, settled disputes among the tribes, or between man and man, he did so only as the organ and mouthpiece of the power above that really dictated the decision. Already, by the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, who came to meet him in the wilderness, he had appointed subordinate judges, to aid him in thus settling disputes among the people. He chose "out of all the people able men, such as feared God, men of truth, hating covetousness." These, as Jethro said, were to "judge the people at all seasons." "Every great matter they shall bring unto thee; but every small matter they shall judge." And this distinctive function also was assigned to Moses himself: — "Thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they

must walk, and the work that they must do." The whole scheme of government, then, both the ordinances and laws, and the selection of the men by whom these were to be administered, emanated directly from Jehovah speaking through the mouth of Moses. In this way, too, the succession to the leadership of the people, after the death of him who was, humanly speaking, their great deliverer, guide, legislator, and judge, was to be provided for; — not through election by the people; not by hereditary descent, so as to pass to the children of Moses; but by the favor of the Lord attending all the enterprises, and crowning with success all the undertakings, of the valiant and righteous man, who, inspired by Jehovah, should step forward to assume the vacant place. This was the promise made unto them by their great leader in his last speech to Israel preparatory to his own death. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." And this promise was kept; a succession of valiant and righteous men, Joshua, Gideon, Jephthah, Samuel, did come forward, and sat in Moses' seat, and became judges of Israel.

This Hebrew polity, together with the ordinances and laws to be observed by the people which accompanied it, was evidently based upon the great under-

lying truth already adverted to, that God directly and immediately governs the life that now is, overruling and disposing all events in it so as to justify and confirm the law of righteousness. "This do and thou shalt live" is the oft-repeated injunction. "All these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God." "But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out." Under this grand sanction the Decalogue was proclaimed from Mt. Sinai and engraved upon tables of stone; and the many supplementary injunctions to be merciful to the poor and the stranger, to the widow and the fatherless, and to do justice even to an enemy, were added. What we are first concerned to notice in these ordinances is this pure and beautiful morality which they thus inculcate, so unlike what could reasonably be expected in that remote age, amid those desert surroundings, and addressed to a people just rescued from debasing servitude, while the nations around them were still sunk in the vilest corruption and wickedness. In his conception of what constitutes holiness unto the Lord, Moses has not been surpassed by any moralist or legislator of ancient or modern times. His is still the law to which every Christian man of culture and refinement assumes to conform his conduct and life, even

at this late day. In this respect, all of us are, or ought to be, disciples of Moses.

In marking out a broad scheme of polity and life for his people, at once comprehensive and minute in its details, Moses seems to have attributed the chief importance to his institution of the Sabbath, repeating the injunction again and again in earnest and solemn words, as if he would fain make it more impressive and binding by repetition. Its nature and the plan for its observance were simple enough. Each seventh day was to be a period of absolute rest both for man and beast, "holy unto the Lord;" — that is, observed from a religious motive, or as a sacred duty. No special act or ceremony was required to be then performed. Merely, "in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates." This was inserted in the Decalogue, and is the only positive institution so placed, the nine other Commandments being moral and religious injunctions of natural and universal obligation. And the penalty by which this observance was enforced was stern enough: "whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people;" "he shall surely be put to death." As already remarked, the institution then and there enjoined has been adopted in its main



features by cultured and enlightened Christendom. Imperfectly observed though it be, it has become a badge and safeguard of modern civilization. Without a fixed period of emancipation from the otherwise constantly recurring pressure of animal wants and bodily toil, man gradually loses the capacity of continuous reflection and a truly spiritual life. Under the hardening influence of habit, accustomed only to low aims and purely mechanical pursuits, he becomes degraded in the scale of being. He is no longer capable of acting from a sense of duty or of communing with himself, but sinks into a dreary routine of sensual enjoyments and purely physical exertions which would scarcely tax the energies of a brute. The Mosaic institution of the Sabbath, or a modification of it, gives him a period of enforced leisure for pure thought, and thus opens a door for honorable ambition and virtuous effort.

Three annual festivals, each of them covering a period of seven or eight days, and having its own peculiar rites and observances, together with the Sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee, were added by Moses to his institution of the Sabbath. The idea was the same throughout, frequently to remind the people through these recurrent holy-days or holidays, that there was a service to be performed for the wants of the spirit, as well as for those of the body; that over and above their secular cares and



the labor required to satisfy their merely animal needs, they owed a duty to the government under which they lived, a duty of allegiance to the God of their fathers who had rescued them from servitude, fed them in the desert, and brought them to the borders of the promised land. Church and state being blended into one in their theocracy, patriotism was identified with religious obligation, so that the observance of these festivals corresponded to the military service and other duties imposed by modern communities on all their citizens. Two of these annual feasts, the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, were strictly commemorative in character, and the special rites and acts with which they were celebrated served to perpetuate the people's memory of the great events in their early national history. To us in these modern days they are interesting, as the traditional observance of them, coming down from so remote an antiquity, is a complete voucher for the authenticity of the written narrative of those events.

We are thus brought to the general question, the last one which I shall have to consider; namely, of what use is this broad and complex system of external religious acts, that is, of rites and ceremonies, which was constituted by the Levitical law, this body of ritualism more comprehensive and minute than is found in any other religion under the sun?

Since God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, why enjoin any pious observance beyond that of the silent internal communion of the soul with itself and with its Maker, and that of the virtuous life to which such pious meditation points, and which, if continuous or sufficiently frequent, it would surely produce? Of what real use or significance in pure religion is an external rite, a mere ceremony? In all frankness I answer, that if men were angels or pure disembodied spirits, it would be of no use whatever; and therefore, in the future life, in the spiritual state of being which awaits us beyond the grave, I don't believe there will be any fixed observances, for we shall not need them. But while on this earth, man is of the earth, earthy. The constantly recurring wants of the body, the necessity of providing for its material support, make us dependent upon the senses, and upon the relations of the senses to external material things. Even the imagination is only a duplication of the sense, since we can imagine only what is sensible, particular, and concrete. In short, man is a compound, a dual being; on the one side, an animal, formed from the dust of the ground, and subject to all the limitations and defects, all the passions and appetites, of an animal; on the other side, he is a spirit, created, not *formed*, when his Maker breathed into his

nostrils the breath of life, so that he "became a living *soul*." Hence the necessity imposed upon us of leading a dual life; if either side of human nature is exclusively developed and fostered, the other is famished and dies out, and one becomes at best but half a man. If enslaved altogether to flesh and sense, he is a mere brute; if he tries to refine and sublimiate his life into pure spirit, he becomes unfitted for the duties of this world, and might as well pass out of it altogether. A monk shut up all the time in his cell, a Simeon Stylites wearying out existence on the top of a column, though incessantly occupied with pious meditations, are useless and worthless beings.

It is no paradox, then, to affirm that just in proportion as Moses taught his people a purely spiritual religion, and strictly forbade "any similitude," any form of idolatry, in the same proportion he saw it was necessary to fence round this revived faith with ceremonies and external forms, or it would speedily die out, and Israel would lapse again into the worship of a golden calf. The polytheism of Egypt, of Greece and Rome, surrounded man with visible and tangible objects of worship, with images and statues, with temples, altars, sacrifices, and victims. Gods were placed everywhere, in every fountain, grove, and stream, in each of the heavenly bodies, and in each individual tree of an oak forest. The

very air was thick with deities. The faith of Moses swept away this whole complex apparatus as gross, heathenish, and idolatrous. But if he had stopped there, leaving only the bodiless worship of one God as pure spirit, leaving nothing for sense and imagination to feed upon, he would have reduced religion to an abstract idea ; and this, with the rude and unlettered people whom he had led into the wilderness, would not, humanly speaking, have survived the second generation. He showed the wisdom of a statesman, if not the inspiration of a saint, by building up the elaborate and imposing scheme of Hebrew ritualism, which was not idolatrous, because each rite and ceremony was expressly held to be merely commemorative or symbolical. Nothing outward was worshipped, but the inward meaning of each observance was the spiritual recognition and adoration of the one true God.

The wisdom of the Mosaic institution has been proved and illustrated in these modern times by the varying fortunes of the several churches and denominations which have been developed out of the great Reform movement of the sixteenth century. The early Reformers, in their eagerness to depart as far as possible from Rome, made a great mistake in their excessive iconoclasm. The Puritans threw down not only the images of the saints, but every cross and crucifix ; they dispersed the choirs, broke

the painted windows, took down the two tables of the Law, upset the font, put a pine table in place of the altar, and reduced the public worship of God to extemporaneous prayer, the rudest psalm singing, and a sermon of fearful length and aridity. They did their best to strip religion bare of all external apparel, and reduce it to pure thought, to an abstract idea. They proscribed the observance even of the two great festivals of the Church, Christmas and Easter, substituting Thanksgiving for the one and Fast-day for the other, — two institutions which, as they commemorate nothing and symbolize nothing save two religious states of mind, gratitude and penitence, have in themselves no root of permanence, but are conventional and temporary. One of them is practically dead already, and the other is moribund. The inevitable result followed, weariness and indifference creeping in when men found that the only public worship of God consisted in going to meeting on Sunday, and listening to a sermon which too frequently degenerated into a sensational lyceum lecture. The state of mind thus induced is set forth with much liveliness by Wordsworth in his half-heathenish sonnet, wherein he exclaims, —

“It moves us not. — Great God ! I’d rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,



Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."

But within our own day, a reaction from this excessive iconoclasm has been produced, and the tide now sets strongly towards those "fair humanities of old religion" which have always constituted the strength of the Mother Church. In the Anglican church we have witnessed a convulsive outburst of Ritualism, which seems to out-Herod Herod by aiming not merely to equal, but to surpass, Romanism in the gorgeous display of external forms and ordinances. And in denominations of Puritan, and even of Unitarian, parentage, a corresponding movement is going on. Elaborate choral services and responsive readings are introduced; the visible sign of the cross appears both without and within. Painted windows again cast a "dim religious light," sometimes through the colored forms of saints and martyrs; the two tables of the Law are again hung up in sight of the congregation. Prayers are simultaneously uttered from pew and pulpit. And our "meeting-houses" are again dressed with evergreen at Christmas, and with flowers at Easter. I almost anticipate the time when our churches will be open during the week, as well as on Sunday, so that, at any hour, the solitary penitent may enter to kneel and pray before the visible symbols of the Body



and Blood of Christ. Think what we may of this revival, it springs from a real want, a craving, of our common nature, which cannot be withstood; and it manifests at this late day the wisdom or the inspiration of Moses, call it which you please, in ordaining rich and complex rites and ceremonies for observance by the Hebrew people.

I hoped to add some farther consideration of the history and the institutions of the Hebrew people, as these are set forth in our English Bible, and especially of the lives and characters of their great kings and prophets. But time and opportunity were wanting, and this portion of the subject must remain for treatment by another hand and on some future occasion. In view, however, merely of what has been said, however imperfectly, of the external merits of our Common Version, and of the narratives, the poetry, and the philosophy which are set forth in it, it is for the student to determine whether any system of liberal education can be regarded as complete and generous which does not include thorough study of this great body of Hebrew and Christian literature. My own strong conviction is, that the only hope for the civilization and the happiness of the generations that are to come in this English-speaking world depends on the continued reverent study of the English Bible. Especially is this true in regard to those few great

doctrines, those underlying truths, so simply and briefly expressed, which I have ventured to call the philosophy of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. For, know it well, the only choice for us, in this piping nineteenth century, lies between this old philosophy of the Hebrews and the philosophy of despair, the pessimism of Hartmann and Schopenhauer. I know it is said by those who deprecate any such regard for the consequences of our opinions, that we have only to follow out loyally our own doubts or convictions, be they what they may, since the interests of truth are paramount. But they misconstrue their own adage. We hold as firmly as they do, that the truth can do no harm; and it is just because the acceptance of their doctrine does, and will do, immeasurable harm to the best interests of humanity, that we are firmly convinced their doctrine is not the truth. For, either the one God, father of all, the God alike of Jew, Christian, and Mahometan, still lives and reigns enthroned above all height, still moves and governs the universe which he created, or there comes a wail of never dying sorrow from an orphan world and a dead eternity, a pitiable cry which declares existence to be a burden and a wrong, and bids us eat, drink, and rot, for to-morrow we sleep and never wake again. Atheism and pessimism are as naturally and closely related to each other as Sin

and Death, whom Milton's sublime allegory represents as keeping guard at the gates of hell over

"The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark  
Illimitable ocean, without bound,  
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and heighth,  
And time and place, are lost; where eldest Night  
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold  
Eternal anarchy amidst the noise  
Of endless wars, and by confusion stand :  
For hot, cold, moist, and dry, four champions fierce,  
Strive here for mastery, and to battel bring  
Their embryon atoms."

Whether, out of such a Chaos, these "embryon atoms" could of themselves, unguided by any organizing mind, have evolved and maintained a universe in which law and order, intellect and conscience, appear and reign, is a question which will hardly be of doubtful decision by any competent thinker. Science herself tells us that they could thus only perpetuate Night and Chaos, since nothing could be evolved out of atoms which was not previously involved in them.











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